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A STORY OF TO-DAY

BY

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Author of "The Jessamy Bride," "The Millionaires," "A Nest of Linnets," etc. etc.

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THE ULSTERMAN

CHAPTER I

IT was within five minutes of midnight on the eleventh of July, and in some of the cottages in the Ulster village of Arderry lights were beginning to appear, and the upper halves of some of the doors giving upon the street were opened, a figure appearing at each for a few moments and then withdrawing to give the report of the weather to the people within—their voices of enquiry might have been heard by anyone passing. Before the church clock had struck the hour, there was a sound as of a hollow cask being rolled over an uneven road; but anyone with discriminating ears, after a minute's uncertainty, would have known that it proceeded from the furtive tapping of several drums. It was soft, but immensely hollow, suggestive of the reverberation of the sea swinging into a long cave. Then several of the uppers of half-doors were pulled open and a man's head and shoulders showed at each, sharply defined against the candlelight of the kitchen beyond, and neighbours greeted one another with the curt cordiality of the district.

"Bully Jimmy!"

"Bully Sammy!"

That was the usual morning exchange of greeting.

"Bully William John!"

"Morrow, boy!"

So the compliment was passed on; but in some cases two men might be looking out for a minute before exchanging a word, though each was well aware of the other's presence.

"It's going to be quare and fine the day, so it is!"

"That's a fine night!"

"Ah'm sayin', wee falla, is thon Andy Graham makin' ready at the big dhrum?"

"Ask me no queschins and ah'll tell ye no lies."

"They say that ould Bob Nelson's goin' for to walk this Twalfth."

"You're a liar!"

"It's thrue. Ask wee Bob."

"Did ye ever hear tell o' the like o' thon?"

"What is it that yizins is sayin'?"

"Ould Bob Nelson's goin' for to walk the day."

"You're makin' fun! Well, that bates all. He'll never see eighty."

"Hell ter my sowl, if he bain't nearder till ninety."

"Ay, an' them 'uns we seen yesterday said that there's sure to be cloddin'."

"There will sure if Magill's Papishes is loosed on us."

"Let them thry just; it won't be with holy water we'll baste them, so it won't. There's th' ould clock at last. An' so for another Twalfth."

"We can hear it for weerselves, so we can, Jimmy. Here's till King Wullyum and t' ell with the Pope!"

The laconic chat in the Mid-Antrim dialect passing from mouth to mouth of the men leaning over the

half-doors of the houses was interrupted by the church clock's striking the hour of midnight, making all who heard it aware of the fact that another Twelfth of July, the great Orange Anniversary, had come. And before the last stroke had died away, there came from three or four different parts of Arderry the sound of the loud thumping of big drums—not the furtive tapping that had been going on for the previous half-hour, but the heavy resonant unreserved stroke of the hard ball of the drumstick against an expanse of sheepskin the size of a large cartwheel. It was the drum *obbligato* to the Orange Anthem of "Boyne Water" that the drums were supposed to be delivering, all being at variance as to time. But when the booming had gone on for some minutes there came the feeble strident squeal of a fife or two, struggling to assert itself against the bullying of the drums, and succeeding in doing so about as effectively as a cricket's chirrup would against a roll of distant thunder. The raucous sound of the corn-crakes in the meadow beyond the river disputed more successfully the supremacy of the booming drums.

In the course of another half-hour the little town was fitfully astir. The smell of frying bacon came from many a half-open door, and young men and girls—most of them workers in Alexander's mill—were already out upon the street in the darkness, and exchanging greetings, which took the form of personal gibes—a little too coarse for ordinary use between young people, but by no means out of place in Arderry and the neighbourhood: pachydermata are not to be tickled with a feather. Yells of laughter came from many directions, but they were not the result of any humorous

sally; they were due to the successful carrying out of some joke no more subtle than the knocking off of a cap or the pushing—it was termed "dunching"—of a boy into a muddy place; there is never a lack of muddy patches in Arderry. Occasionally a door would open and a woman would call out to one of the groups:

"Are ye there, Mary Awn? I'm sayin' are ye there, Mary Awn?"

"Ay, awm here. What d'ye want?"

"Come back intill the house, or it'll not be tellin' ye."

"Maggie McKee's here."

"Aw don't care who's there or who isn't. If ye don't do as y'are bid, aw'll warm yer ear for ye, so aw will. Come intill the house and get on ye."

"Ah don't need till get on me. Ah'm dressed this half-hour."

"Quit yer strealin' through the town at this hour o' the night. If ye don't come speedy ah'll send yer da out for ye, and I warrant ye it's brought in by the lug ye'll be, if he catches a hould o' ye."

With a grumble one of the girls would detach herself from a group and stroll unwillingly to her mother, followed by the gibes of her companions. When she had returned to the house and the door had been shut upon her, the sound of her mother's scolding and of her quick replies called for roars of laughter from the girls and some of the boys.

And the drums increased in volume, and the fifes became more strident and less responsible to the drums, and people passed down the street making calls and enquiries. There was an altercation between two young fellows respecting a statement made by one of them the previous year which had been rankling

in the other's memory, but no blows were exchanged, and the Constabulary patrol kept at a discreet distance and would not have hastened their steps even if blows had been struck. A quarrel among friends on "the Twalfth" is treated negligently by the discreet members of the Force. They know that there may be a more legitimate demand for their interference before the day is over. But this incident marked the climax of the first hour's excitement; by the time the church clock had struck one the street was deserted; only a single big drum was booming, and that was because it was under the control of a youth who had never previously had a chance of expressing his ambitions through such a medium. This was his first "Twalfth" in command of a drum, and he was intoxicated when he found out with what ease he could make the window frames shake. He could not be persuaded to leave off, as the others had done. His friends who had retired into their houses to have some sleep, put out their heads once more and shouted to him to give over his nonsense—a few cursed him for a fool, and one threatened to give him a clout that should put him past drumming for the rest of his life. But still he went on until his own father rushed out upon him and knocked him sprawling over the drum, then picking up the scattered drumsticks, returned with them to his house, saying:

"That'll larn ye, ye looney! Get intill the house in quick time, or it'll not be tellin' ye! Ye'll not be so active by tea-time, you an' your dhrumsticks."

He waited at the door until his son—a lad of nineteen—had picked himself up and swung the drum—it was as big as a medium-sized water-butt—sideways

on his loins, and lurched sullenly toward the house. When he got within a couple of yards of the door he made a rush through, avoiding, by an adroitness due to long practice, the full-handed "clout" that he knew his father would aim at him as he passed the threshold. But the father overreached himself, for the drum swung round and the rim gave him a sharp knock on one of his calves.

"Take thon dunchin' thing by me or ah'll hit it a kick that'll put it past blatterin' for all time," he cried in surly tones, as the thing, far too big for the narrow doorway, dumped upon the boards. When the door was shut there was silence in the village street; only at the other side of the door some loud words were spoken. It was by the father and not the son they were spoken. There was not a house in the street where parental discipline was so lax as to allow of a son of nineteen—or for that matter, a son of thirty—answering back when subjected to the abuse of his father.

Six hours later the village was fully awake. The smell of the frying bacon mingled with the fragrance of the soda bread that was being baked on the griddles over turf fires in most houses, though others were provided with ranges burning coal, and in such cases the soda bread was baked in a "tin" in the oven and turned out when it had "risen." But the appetising fragrance was the same in both cases, and the men who were standing outside their doors in their shirt-sleeves did not need to be called to by their wives a second time when their breakfast was ready. It was more than a Sunday breakfast that the men in Sunday

white shirt-sleeves were called to. It was festal, with no shadow of Sabbath services hanging over the table. The men and boys could loiter over the meal, and they did so, being fully dressed for the day, with the exception of their coats and the broad sashes of the Orange Institution. But the women and girls, having still to do their "dressing," thought it better not to dawdle at the table. They poured their tea into their saucers —it had been "wet" for three-quarters of an hour and was as black as ink—and swallowed it, holding a "farl" of hot soda bread in their spare hand, and taking capacious bites alternately with the sips from their saucers. They were in demi-toilette, and they knew that whatever time they might have at their disposal for dressing, it would be all too short for their needs.

There was not much jesting over these breakfast tables; any remark that is meant as a jest in one of these Ulster households would be regarded as a full-flavoured insult in the Southern provinces. Hard personal home-thrusts, heavy-handed banter, ruthless fingers laid upon the raw of old wounds, fierce satire upon matters as definitely personal as a freckled face, a pimple on the chin, a too obvious hair-curler, a prominent tooth—these are the leading features of domestic humour in such Ulster households.

And when the womenfolk had replied in like to the personalities of the men and had gone to their rooms to be *en grande tenue* for the procession of the day, the men lit up their pipes and partook of a "half-'un"—the first of many to be taken in order to keep green the memory of the monarch whom they professed to revere. One would run a chance of being misunderstood, how-

ever, if one were to talk in the neighbourhood of Arderry about keeping the memory of their hero green —the figure of speech would be regarded as singularly infelicitous. On the Twelfth of July everything is tinted with orange. The meadows are looked at askance.

During the hour following breakfast a good many "half-'uns" were consumed by men in shirt-sleeves, for they lounged from door to door, and it was thought discourteous, if not actually disloyal, to refuse an invitation to this fiery sip. But the indulgence was only on the part of the full-grown men; they forbade their sons to touch an intoxicant so long as they were under the paternal roof, and even youths of twenty smoked tobacco only by stealth. The most self-indulgent parents outside Scotland are to be found in Mid-Ulster, and the strictest disciplinarians.

When it was ten o'clock there was a goodly gathering of people beneath the lily festoons and the purple banners of the Orange Hall. A couple of hundred men dressed in their Sunday garments, and wearing enormous sashes of orange, blue, and purple; and nearly as many young fellows, with women of various ages between sixteen and fifty wearing frocks and hats that represented a year's hoarding, made up a crowd the elements of whose gaiety were strictly confined to their attire. There was no such element in their faces. There was no suggestion of good fellowship or jollity in any direction. The men wore the expression of seasoned soldiers going into battle, and the women, young and old, seemed to convey the idea that they were the wives and daughters of such soldiers. Of course the girls eyed one another's dresses and hats

and passed comments on them, usually leaning to the side of disparagement, but there was no giggling in the crowd; the young men whose sweethearts were among the women made no move in their direction; they slouched about with their hands in their pockets or leant against the wall of the Orange Hall, turning their heads every two or three seconds to spit on the ground beside them. Their faces were a blank, and the sweethearts on their side showed equal indifference. When, a few minutes later, a contingent from a couple of neighbouring villages marched up with scarves and banners and a silent drum and fifes, they were received without cheers—almost without salutation. There was scarcely any shaking of hands, only a phrase or two about the rain keeping off. A few minutes later a car drove up carrying a young man wearing a tall hat and a frock-coat crossed by a broad orange sash. He had gloves.

He leaped off the car and pushed his way without ceremony to where the biggest Arderry banner was tugging at its poles and guy-ropes as if it were a captive balloon.

"Are you there, Jammy? Where's Jammy Martin? Whereabouts is Jammy Martin?" called the newcomer.

"He's just gone into the Hall, Mr. Campbell," said one of the men who was tugging at a banner rope.

"Bid him come here, some of ye—no, hould on; I'll go myself," said Mr. Campbell.

He hurried through the porch of the little Orange Hall, and called out:

"Are you there, Jammy Martin? I'm sayin' are you there?"

"Ay, ah'm here," came a reply from a man who was talking to a couple of others in the large room. "We're all ready to start. You'll lead as usual, ah suppose."

"I suppose so. What's to keep us now? Bid them fall in, the Ardeen True Blues first; then the Girvock Purple Heroes, and the Ballyshane Black Knights hindmost. Have the Blacks two banners?"

"They have that—the 'Open Bible' and 'Derry's Walls.' Ye can see them from here."

"Two new banners? That bates all! How are ye, Mr. Glen?"

"I'm brave and tired, Mr. Campbell."

"Ye'll be tireder before night, so ye will. We must make a start at wonst. Who's got our drum?"

"I expect it's Charless Orr. Ay, it's Charlie."

"Are ye ready, Mr. Campbell?"

"I'm ready. On ye go. True Blues fornenst the Hall."

Mr. Campbell, Master of Arderry Orange Lodge, pulled down his sash where it had buckled under his shoulder and stepped out from the porch to take his place at the head of the procession that was being formed to walk the four miles which divided Arderry from the field at Ballyboye, where the great demonstration was to take place.

CHAPTER II

ARDERRY is one of the large villages or small towns of Ulster. It has a population of close upon three thousand, and all are more comfortably and more cheaply housed than any artisan community in the kingdom. There is not an insanitary dwelling in Arderry, and not one that is not as ugly as a house can be made by man. Two long rows form a street so straight that it might have been planned by Peter the Great on the lines laid down by him for the road between the old capital and the new. The shop fronts—a baker's, a draper's, a grocer's, and a tailor's, all on a small scale—cause the only divergence from the monotony of the architecture. There is no patch of garden at any house, although there are meadows all around the town, and farms here and there on to the low hills of Ballyshane. No one seemed to want a garden at Arderry when the street was built to accommodate the workers at Gibson's Mill fifty years ago, and no one seems to feel the need for a garden up to the present. An appreciation of anything that is only beautiful has no place in Mid-Ulster; if it is useful or if money can be made of it, it will be valued in spite of its beauty.

And Arderry is one of the typically prosperous communities in Ulster. The flax mills give employment to hundreds of men and women, boys and girls,

so that there is scarcely a house that has not from two to three pounds to spend every week, and there is scarcely a house that does not spend every week all that it receives. The people live well and wastefully. There are three public-houses in the town, and every evening the three are crowded; but that is not the same as saying that all the men are drunkards. The drunkards are few, but the men who "take a drop" are numerous. A man may have three or four "half-'uns" in the course of the night, and feel nothing the worse for the indulgence. The mill-worker who takes a glass of beer at any time during the day, after the custom of his brethren in the same circumstances on the other side of the Channel, is a rarity; and even when trade is briskest, the man who fails to start work punctually on Monday morning is rarer still. The men as well as the women go to church every Sunday—some to the Episcopal, but the larger number to the Presbyterian churches, of which there are two within easy reach of the town. There is also a small Methodist chapel about a mile away. This does duty for Arderry as well as the villages of Girvock and Ballyshane. Standing a little way off the roadside there is a tiny chapel surrounded by fifty or sixty head-stones of the simplest character. This is a survival of a faith that was represented in many parts of the plantation of Ulster a hundred years ago—the meeting-house and burial-ground of the Society of Friends. All but a few have disappeared from this part of Ulster; but a bequest of a member who died sixty years ago has provided for the upkeep of the little place of worship and place of burial, and the windows are always scrupulously clean.

This relic of an interesting past is regarded with indifference by the neighbourhood. The Orangemen of Girvock wanted it for an Orange Hall, to save themselves the walk of a mile to Arderry; but there were trustees to approach on this subject, and they explained that even if they had power to let or to sell the little building, they could scarcely with propriety allow it to be used except for the promulgation of doctrines of peace.

"As much as to say that an Orangeman doesn't be on the side of peace!" said the Master of the Girvock Lodge. "Ah'd knock hell out o' the fella that wrote that letter if he telled me that ah wasn't on the side o' peace, the ruffin!"

From these statistics it will be understood that the people of Arderry are on the side of religion—provided that it is a Protestant religion. There is not one of them that does not hold that every other religion that is or that has been in the world is vile—but the vilest of all is the Roman Catholic belief. There is not one of them that does not hold that if Romanism is a religion at all, it is the one which is professed by Satan, and that its doctrines have been formulated by him for the undoing of mankind, a crisis which can only be averted by the efforts of the Orange Institution. But what these doctrines actually are, no attempt is ever made to define.

It was a most moderate man of this community who, on talking rather strongly about the wickedness of the late Pope in a public-house in England, was expostulated with by a stranger who professed to be a Protestant, and was yet ready to acknowledge that the Pope was an able statesman as well as the head of

a great Church, and that his counsel had more than once prevented an outbreak of war.

"Don't try to force that down my throat," said the Orangeman. "Maybe you don't know what a bad name the Pope has in the neighbourhood of Girvock."

But in Mid-Ulster there is no attempt made to analyse the reason for the hatred of Papists any more than ordinary people try to find out why they throw up their hands if they are startled at something: the one thing is as natural as the other, having descended from generation to generation. Here are the descendants of the men who came from England and Scotland to colonise Ulster and to drive out the aborigines. They did not carry out their programme without massacre and retaliations; and for centuries the religion of the natives was declared by law to be accursed, and something to be stamped out as a plague. That is the tradition which fathers inculcated upon their children from generation to generation in Ulster, until——

Well, until the Orange procession with drums and banners from Arderry and the neighbouring towns and villages arrived at the rendezvous in the field, and the Grand Master of the Orange Institution, standing on the platform with clergymen of several Protestant creeds on each side of him, spoke for three-quarters of an hour in defence of the spirit of Orangeism, and in denunciation of the action of a Government that proposed to hand over Protestant prosperity to the domination of a demoralising and debasing creed.

It was not an academic oration, but it was not anæmic. It flowed red and hot from the speaker with

no graces of style to temper it, but many local idioms scattered throughout it to weld it to popular tradition and popular feeling in Mid-Ulster. All of the four or five thousand people in the field did not hear the speech: they had no need to hear it; its lurid phrases had blazed before them hundreds of times—chips from the fiery torch that is sent round the province every July—and they cheered manfully, not in the subdued respectful way of a crowd greeting the arrival of Royalty, but with clenched hands, with fierce eyes, with faces alight with the lust of battle.

And the cheers that followed the delivery of the speech were mingled with those that greeted the rising of a clergyman—not the one who had made the opening prayer, but a Presbyterian—a popular man, the son of a farmer, who spoke in as hard and raucous an Ulster dialect as any of the crowd beneath him. He employed exactly the same metaphors and the same phrases as the previous speaker, but because of the breadth of his mispronunciation of many words, conforming to the Ulster peasant custom, every phrase was received by the crowd with far fiercer demonstrations of approval than they had yet displayed; for every man felt himself to be the orator: every man had probably said the same words in the same way a thousand times, and so felt, not that he was being instructed, but that he himself was the instructor. He cheered his own utterances until he was hoarse.

The third speaker came from a Belfast shipyard, and did not leave his staccato Belfast accent behind him. His speech had the ring of a machine riveter—a quick, sharp rapping-out of word after word that made one feel it would not be safe to contradict him.

He challenged anyone to contradict him, and looked around as if in expectation of his challenge being taken up, and being rather disappointed that it was not. Certainly nothing would have been more heartily welcomed by the crowd than the appearance of a dissentient. The appearance of the dissentient in the good old sport of fox-hunting, when the huntsman flings him into the jaws of thirty couples of hounds, is received with every sign of approval by the hounds. In the absence of anyone differing from him, the orator was compelled to conjure up a phantom opponent, and to this imaginary person he administered a sound drubbing. He ridiculed him and his ancestors, asking him impertinent questions, and then inviting his audience to point fingers of scorn at him for his failure to answer them. Once or twice, to be sure, the poor phantom made an attempt to get in an answer edgewise, as it were, but more feeble efforts could not be imagined, and the howls with which they were greeted were certainly not uncalled for. Then having beyond a doubt got very much the better of an opponent of his own creation, the red-hot riveter followed the example of Apollo in respect of Marsyas and proceeded to flay him. He showed himself to be at his best at this corollary to the disputation; the most meticulous dermatologist would not have been able to say a word against his performance, so completely was it carried out; and the people in the field who loved to see a clean job like this, confirmed the very high estimate which the orator was known to take of his own skill on a platform. They cheered him as he retired, so fiercely that a man who was selling such stimulating refreshments as ginger nuts and spice cakes on a small

cart could only with the greatest difficulty make his voice heard.

Following this successful appearance came a Parliamentary champion, and, being an old campaigner, he perceived in a moment that he would have no chance with an audience so worked up unless he tacked on, at least the beginning of his speech, to the previous speech. He did so with some adroitness.

"You have heard what our friend who has just sat down has said, and you have seen what sort of a man he is; well, all that I'm going to say to you now is that there are in the shipyards at Belfast twenty-five thousand men made on the same pattern, ready to say all that he has said, and what's better, ready to do all that he told you he was ready to do—twenty-five thousand men who are ready to hold the Union Jack in one hand and a rifle in the other if the time should ever come when it will be necessary to defend their homes and the religion of their fathers from the aggressions of Rome and the allies of Rome in the House of Commons."

That was the clarion note which went direct to the heart of the matter, and the speaker knew it. If he had been in any doubt about it when he came forward he could not but be reassured by the cheers that made the ginger-nut man despondent of his own falsetto, well seasoned though it was. "The time for argument is past," said the orator, when he had a chance of making himself heard. "We have tried arguments for many a weary year: they wouldn't listen to us. All right. What we say now is this: 'You say that you'll force us to submit; all right; come and do it—come and do it!'"

That was the end of the oratory for the day. There were several other speakers on the platform and many other resolutions proposed, but these were empty formalities. Everyone saw what everyone has seen thousands of times since the earth was set rolling, that argument is futile, but force is final. Fools argue, but men fight.

"Come and do it—come and do it—let them come and do it." That was the language of the drumsticks as the procession re-formed and marched round the field in all the bravery of sashes and banners. The sweat was pouring down the faces of the drummers, and the blood was dripping from the wrists of some of them, but they knew that the drums were sounding the declaration of Protestantism in Ireland. "Come, come, come; come and do it: come and do it; come, come, come!"

That was the voice which rose superior to all arguments. And it spoke good sense too: there is a large amount of good sense in the hint that there are in two shipbuilding yards in Belfast twenty-five thousand men capable of being mobilised in half an hour and all anxious to throw their weight on one side of the rope in the tug-of-war. "Twenty-five thousand—and these only in two shipyards, mind!" said one of the clergymen leaving the platform in the field.

"Ay, and such men!" said another. "Handling steel plates and chain cables by the ton is very good training for the muscles."

"And they have just to lift up a finger beckoning to their fifty thousand comrades on the Clyde to come over and help them!"

"And that takes no count of the best flesh and

blood in every other workshop in Belfast—in Derry—Ballymena—Ballymoney—every town you choose to name!"

"Oh, let them come and see what comes of their coming to force their Home Rule on us."

"They refused to listen to our arguments in the House," said one of the Members for a county division. "They ran through clause after clause without a word of discussion. Now we'll see how they'll go about enforcing their enactment."

That was the last word of the men who had been on the platform; and the last word of the men who had beaten the drums was practically the same.

One of them was spending an hour or two on his return to Arderry in a public-house. He found himself among friends, but before closing time they had become a little tired of his eulogies of King William; and one of his neighbours, with all the frankness that prevails in Ulster when one thinks it time to take down a friend, said:

"Ah, man dear, don't we all know what you've been telling us? You don't need to be talking all the night to us about King Willyum. I don't believe that for all your talk you know who King Willyum was."

"Ah know more nor you about him," said the drummer.

"Ah'll leave it till the others," cried the other. "Let us see how much you know about him. Tell us who he was, to start with."

"He was Prince of Orange, so he was."

"Oh, ay; and he was King Willyum forbye; but was he an Englishman or an Irishman or a Scotchman?"

"Don't I be telling you that he was Prince of Orange?"

"Oh, ay; but what's Orange? Is Orange a' place or a castle or a river or a sheugh?"

The man began to stutter, and his good-humoured friends began to jeer, imitating rather broadly his confusion. In an instant he had dashed his tumbler on the floor and pulled off his coat.

"Look here," he cried, craning forward his head in an attitude of imminent aggression. "Look here! Ah don't know anything about King Willyum, but ah' don't care a dahm: ah'm the best man in this room. There y'are now. Ah'm telling ye that ah'm the best man in this room!"

That was the public-house equivalent to the challenge delivered by the Grand Master when leaving the platform in the field. If any man questioned Ulster's being right, let him peel off his coat and stand up before Ulster. Protestant Ulster had no notion of being governed by the Papists of the other provinces, and the time of being persuaded that it was for her own good and the good of Ireland generally was long past. Protestant Ulster felt that the Papist provinces might be swept out of existence without any disadvantage to the rest of the world. Their representatives in the House of Commons had been for more than thirty years, with a few insignificant exceptions, men on a level with the hewers of wood and the drawers of water in Protestant Ulster—men who had been taken from behind butchers' blocks, pawnbrokers' counters, from pig-fairs and beer-shops, and sent to Parliament to follow their leader into the lobby with the party with whom they had made their compact.

And was Protestant Ulster going to submit to be governed by such men ?

That was the question which Mr. Campbell, Master of Arderry Orange Lodge, put to the Grand Master when leaving the platform in the field.

The Grand Master, who thought Mr. Campbell a rather pushing person, smiled and said :

"The people of England have submitted to be governed by those same men, off and on, for the past six years."

"And more fools they ! It makes me ashamed to think that we wonst asked the help of England. England won't help us."

"You're right there, Campbell, my man. It's left for Ulster to work out her own salvation."

CHAPTER III

A PROMINENT figure upon the platform was Mr. James Alexander, the owner of Breeney Mills,—a big man, clean-shaven as to his face, but with plenty of iron-grey hair, usually tossed, upon his head. He had not been one of the orators, but he was sure it was generally understood that the effect of his presence on the platform was greater than that of the most forcible of the speeches. He thought that Lord Innisfallen might have been more cordial to him, and he said so to his wife when he had driven home to Arderry and had some refreshment—not tea.

"It was them pushing fellows got between him and I—Joe Campbell, if you please, and Benson, the Martins' manager—they've push in them, so they have. That's the worst of this Orange business: it forces you to rub shoulders with chaps that in ord'nary way of life you'd look for to take off their hats till you."

"There's not much taking off of hats going in these times," said his wife, who was a good-looking woman of fifty—he was fifty-five.

"We were never much given that way in Ulster," said he. "I was never fond of taking off my hat, though I would have done it speedy enough to my betters if I'd found them. I wouldn't tell a lie, however, and make out that I looked on any of them about

me as my betters—no fears! But that Campbell—the fool-man thought, I could see, that his lordship was queerly taken with him, and he went on 'my lording' him and pushing himself between him and the rest of us that no one had a chance of getting in a word edgeways. I suppose his lordship fancied that the man had influence, and that's what made him too polite to tell him to go to blazes."

"They say his lordship doesn't choose his words when he's in the hunting field," suggested Mrs. Alexander.

"The most easy-going of them lets loose in the hunting field," assented her husband. "If I thought that his lordship acted up till Joe Campbell because he had a notion that I had a mind to speak till him, I'd mighty soon show his lordship that I didn't care a snap of my fingers for him, lord or no lord. Why should I care for Lord Innisfallen? Tell me that."

"The idea of it!" exclaimed his wife. "Didn't my mother's uncle mind his grandfather when he used to wheel his barrow into Lisburn every market-day with old clothes for sale—a common pedlar?"

"Not so good as a pedlar," said the man almost savagely. "He's a specimen of the North of Ireland nobility—him and Colman that got to be Lord Chancellor; his father was the Morrisons' butler, so he was."

"The North isn't strong in its nobility," said Mrs. Alexander. "Look at them Belfast knights and baronights—men that were the butts of the common people and the laughing-stock of the rest! Did ever you hear tell o' the like of Sir Daniel Duffin—a man that can't put ten words thegether? And what about

Sir Tommy Driscoll, and Sir Simeon Robert whose da used to sell old clothes on the Shankhill Road ? "

"Why, woman dear, anybody can get one o' them titles nowadays if he wants it and goes the right way about getting it," said her husband. "Just now if any man with the smallest pretensions to be a gentleman in Ulster was to declare himself in favour of Home Rule, Lloyd George would make a peer of him in the twinkling of a bedpost. But up to the present there's only two o' them that's sunk so low as that, and neither of them could be called a gentleman—they both sprung from nothing."

"There's a few boys I could name on our side that has hopes for theirselves when they kill Home Rule and our side gets into power," said the lady with a shrewd smile ; "not that every one o' them isn't true blue to the heart's core, and would knock the face off anybody that would come to them with an offer to turn right about."

Her husband smiled and winked.

"Oh, ay ; there'll be some sore hearts when the pay-day comes," said he. "Maybe Joe Campbell thinks to write 'Bart.' after his name."

"Oh, the poor man ! "

"Poor man, indeed ! But he's rich in push, and I can tell ye, Susan, that in politics a pair of sharp elbows is as good a qualification for getting on as a wise head and a glib tongue, and Joe'll elbow his way into all that he sets his heart on as he did on the platform to-day unto he had the ear of Lord Innisfallen. There was a wheen of boys that was a bit mad with him, I'm telling ye. But anybody could take the measure of poor Joe in a glance, and it's not me that

would say a word again him. Joe is as true blue as the rest of us. There's nothing about us in the North that isn't blue except our blood, and if it comes to bloodshed we'll show them that we're not ashamed to pour out our blood whatever its colour may be."

"It'll never come to that, James. There'll be no call for any of us to shed a drop. As soon as the people of England and Scotland who are our real kith and kin comes to know the truth about Ireland, they'll show that they know the differs between the South and the North."

"We'll not trust till that. What we will trust till is ourselves. We'll snap our fingers at all the rest of the world. Better words than was spoken by Mr. Drew at the tail end of the meeting this day my ears never listened till.' 'What we reply to them that wants to force us to accept Home Rule is, Come and do it—come and do it,' said he. That's Ulster's last word till the Lloyd George gang—'Come and do it.' I'd like to see them try it. I mind very well twenty-five years ago and more the Corporation of Limerick refused to pay the Castle authorities the five hundred pounds levied on them for police—Spencer was Lord-Lieutenant—it was after the Nationalists had murdered Lord Frederick Cavendish and Mr. Burke in the Phœnix Park—and the money hasn't been paid from that day till this. If Dublin Castle couldn't make the Limerick Corporation pay their just debt, will Dublin Castle be strong enough to force Ulster to pay the taxes that a pack of up-the-country fellahs demand? Let them come and do it—them's our last words. I think I could do with a jap of whisky, Susan, woman."

Mr. Alexander had been speaking with his back to

the window—the position gave him full command of the room: it should have been crowded, he felt, and he spoke as if it were. But even with an audience of one he was conscious of all the satisfaction that an orator knows when he has carried away with him a couple of thousand hearers.

He had made a pause between his repetition of the challenging phrase, and the announcement that he would not refuse a drink. He was half-way to the sideboard before his wife said:

"Was Mr. Fullerton on your platform?"

"Ay, was he," he replied idiomatically. And then he poured himself out rather more than the local prescription of whisky, to which he added a spoonful or two of water. He drank it without emotion: it was his seventh since the morning. Without wiping his lips he continued:

"Ay, was he; and spoke well too, but a bit too quiet for the field. Ay, and Jim was well to the front, but I didn't catch a sight of Ned. Where was Ned, anyway?"

"I thought he meant to walk this Twelfth," she replied slowly. "Maybe he went till Ballylessan."

"What for would he go till Ballylessan?" he asked quickly. "What good would going till Ballylessan be to him?"

"I only made a guess at it," said she apologetically. "I thought that maybe he fancied there'd be enough at Ballyboye without him."

"The Ballylessan boys can look after theirselves. Who made Ned the judge of whether there was likely to be enough at Ballyboye? Tell me that, if ye can, my good woman."

"What's the sense in fussing and fuming over the thing like this? I didn't bid him for to go till Ballylessan, if he did go till Ballylessan, which he mayn't have done at all."

"I didn't say you did. Only—well, I've my eyes open. There's not much that passes that I haven't got a speer at, and I've seen that you've seen something about Ned of late that you didn't want to be suspected by anyone, leastways by me."

"Oh, man dear, quit your talking. You're too fond of suspecting things; and as for seeing things, I am beginning to think that you'd do well to see Dr. Brown about your eyes."

"I doubt they're a bit too sharp for a good many bodies' taste."

"I wouldn't say that the man had sharp eyes that's always seeing stars and motes and wee jelly-fish floating throughother in the air when everybody else sees just nothing at all."

"I see more nor motes, I'm telling ye. But don't you mind; I'll bide my time to I'm sure; I know that I be to be sure before I open my mouth till him; but when I am sure Ned and the rest of them had best look out. Now don't you begin your hints to him that I've my eye on him or all the fat'll be in the fire. Leave me to manage my own affairs."

"Oh, the fool-man has a notion that I'd bother my head over him and his foolery!" Mrs. Alexander raised the hand that held the worsted sock she was knitting, in an attitude of amazement as she ejaculated the words. The ball of worsted rolled from her lap to the floor, and as she stooped to retrieve it she gave a little cackle of a laugh.

"James Alexander," she cried in a snappy way, while she stabbed the ball with the knitting needles and rose from her chair. "James Alexander, you'd be a happier man this day if you could be persuaded to believe that everybody's hand is not again you. You began just now by suspecting that Lord Innisfallen meant to give you the cold shoulder when the poor man had no notion of being anything but civil as civil could be to you; and then you come on to accuse me and Ned of plotting again you! Man dear, you'd be a deal happier if you'd take less store of trifles that mean nothing to nobody. Take things easier, my good man. But what's the good of me talking now when I've been at it for the past thirty years to you without getting you to listen till sense?"

"I'll listen till sense when I hear it," said he. "What for is the tea not laid yet? It's nearer seven nor six."

"That's what I'm going to see about now," his wife replied. "I suppose Jane thinks that the Twelfth comes like Christmas only wanst a year."

She went to the door and opened it; but even before she had taken a step out she looked back and said:

"Oh, Jane has returned after all."

"So I perceive," said he.

And so anyone with the least sense of smell would have perceived. Through the open door there came a dense odour of frying herrings.

CHAPTER IV

THERE was no nonsense about the Alexanders. So the head of the family had been asserting so vehemently since he had built his house, calling it Ardreagh, that the shrewd ones among his hearers felt certain that there must have been a good deal of nonsense about the Alexanders, or he would not have been so urgent in his protestations to the contrary. But those who were the shrewdest knew perfectly well that all James Alexander meant by his protestations was that he would not alter his dinner hour from one o'clock to half-past seven, though he could well afford to do so, in imitation of the gentry, and that he would not "set up" a butler or a footman as several ostentatious families whom he could name had done as soon as they had got on a bit in the world, or even sooner.

"We began life as plain people and we intend to remain plain people," he said when his neighbours had rallied him in the unambiguous way they adopt in the North of Ireland when they wish to be satirical, about the building of the house. "Late dinner, swallow-tail coat and white choker? No fears! Many's the time I've eat my dinner in my shirt-sleeves, and felt nothing the worse for it, and many's the time I'll do it again if I've a mind to. And if I don't put on a white choker when I'm at my dinner, you may be

sure that I'll have no man at the back of my chair with one round his neck. And them that that's not good enough for can stay away from my house."

This ostentatious unostentation deceived no one. Everyone knew that he was overflowing with pride at being able to build Ardreagh; and for having a dining-room four feet longer than the corresponding apartment in Danesfort, the mansion which Mr. Megarry of the Ballyboye Mills had built for himself, and the Megarrys were one of the old families in Ballyboye, having held their mill since long before the Civil War in America set all the linen lappers in Belfast looking about to see where they could build a mill. Mr. Alexander had been one of the lads in the Megarrys' mill at Ballyboye.

"What's the length of thon room?" he had asked his architect when the plans of Ardreagh were laid before him, and he laid a finger upon the biggest of the squares outlined before him.

"Twenty-five feet, not including the bay window," replied the architect.

"And what's the size of the biggest room at Danesfort—you built Danesfort, didn't you?"

"Twenty-six feet, I believe."

"Then make mine thirty. I'll show them what I can do, though Megarry give me many's a clout on the ear when he looked into the carding-room, and him and me was one age."

The architect smiled.

"You've given him many a clout since, Mr. Alexander, by all accounts," said he.

"Ay, many's a one—many's a one; and this'll be another—make it a good four feet longer. It'll be a

brave wee clout that he'll feel when it gets abroad that Jimmy Alexander has built a dining-room in his new house more'n four feet longer nor the best Charlie Megarry could do with. I wouldn't keep it a secret if I was you; it may do you good in your business to let people know that you can build such a room."

"You may trust to me, Mr. Alexander, but I doubt if Mr. Megarry will feel it to be as sore a clout as your getting the big order for the Green Star sheets last year—a thousand dozen, wasn't it?" said the architect.

Mr. Alexander's eyes gleamed, his mouth twitched as if he were licking his lips.

"A clout? Yon was no clout, it was a dunch—man, but I hit him a quare dunch that day."

"It will be a long day before that thousand dozen sheets turn into clouts," remarked the architect.

And when he got back to his office in Belfast he gave a good imitation of his client's gloating over the prestige conferred upon him by the possession of a thirty-foot dining-room; and his partner, who was an adept at cubic measure as it related to the increasing of the dimensions of a room beyond the limits contracted for, took good care that Mr. Alexander paid fully for the luxury of "clouting" the man who had been severe to him in his youth forty years before.

And the people before whom Mr. Alexander protested himself to be a plain man and without any nonsense grinned and asked if it was true that Mr. Megarry was adding another ten feet to his dining-room. There is no great subtlety in the sarcasm of the North of Ireland business man.

But even on the festival of "the Twelfth" Mr.

Alexander would relax nothing of his Spartan plainness; and the meal that was spread over the table in the thirty-foot dining-room was simplicity itself. It was called tea, and the title-rôle was taken by a big urn of Victorian massiveness that stood in front of Mrs. Alexander, with white and gold china cups and saucers. Everything else on the table was displayed on the same ambitious scale. There was a ham, a pair of cold fowl, and a distinned tongue, on dishes. These were cold; the only hot eatable was represented by a huge hillock of fried herrings. They had followed hard upon the odour of their cooking—extremely appetising Mr. Alexander found that odour, and he had a word of sarcasm for his daughter Helen when she found it distasteful. The young lady had been born long after her parents had left their cottage in which her mother had done all the cooking, and which usually imprisoned an atmosphere of its own that was never free from a suspicion of the frying of herrings; and so she could not appreciate in any measure the tradition of eager anticipation maintained by the smell in the nostrils of her father.

"It's abominable," grumbled Miss Helen as she took her seat. "There's not a room in the house that isn't full of it. Why can't that girl keep the kitchen door closed when she is frying those things? And why must we always have herrings?"

"Maybe you'd like flying fish for a change," said her father cheerfully. "Mother, what for don't you choose a dozen of flying fish at the market instead of them herrings to suit the delicate taste of yon gyerl?"

The girl frowned but made no further protest, beyond choosing tinned tongue and ignoring the fish.

"We'll have the more for weerselves, eh, Jimmy?" said her father with a wink at his son when Helen had refused the lure of the fish.

Jimmy smiled and thought it prudent to take a herring, though he hated that particular fish and recoiled from the atmosphere it created.

The mother poured out large cups of very dark tea in silence. There was no complaint heard respecting the tea: everybody liked it as nearly black as it could be made. Mr. Alexander gave it a word of praise as he sent up his cup to be refilled.

"It's the right sort of tea thon," he said. "Man, but it takes a quare grip on the second water!"

His criticism, if generous, was not undeserved: although liberally watered his fresh helping was quite as dark as the first cupful.

He had finished it and was taking a second bannock of soda bread before he made any reference to the stirring proceedings of the day.

"How are ye after the meeting, boy?" he enquired of his son.

"I can't complain," replied the son in the cautious tone he had inherited from his Scottish ancestors. "Lord Innisfallen might have been a bit stronger, I thought."

"He might easy ha' been that," said his father. "He's a 'haw-haw' sort of fella at the best, and that's not the sort of gentleman for us just now. Did ye see how Joe Campbell elbowed his way up till him and buttered him up about his speech—milording him enough to make a body sick?"

"I expect he thought that his lordship would feel uneasy about the effect of his speech until he learned

what Joe Campbell thought of it," said the son; and Mr. Alexander gave a contemptuous guffaw.

"I wouldn't put it past him," he said. "Joe stood fornenst Mr. Emerson when Lord Innisfallen was on his way till him—Mr. Emerson, I mean—and not a word could his lordship get in till Joe had said his say. He has the cheek of the devil himself, so he has."

"And him only the Master of the Derryvolgy Lodge!" remarked Mrs. Alexander.

"That's all that he is; but he has the impidence of the Grand Master himself, so he has," said her husband. "But he's one o' them fellas that has neither gumption nor grammar."

"Any fool could take the measure of Joe Campbell," said Jim. "He gets enough rubs to bring him down a peg or two in the course of a week, one way or another, but he always turns up smiling."

"When a fella like yon has a sash about him there's no standing him at all: he feels himself the equal of the King in his corporation robes."

"The equal? the superior," said Jim, with a laugh in which his mother joined.

"Of course it would never do to say anything about this outside weerselves," remarked the father with a look round the table. "Awnything that we may say about Joe or awny other man that's true to the right side in this crisis is all in the way of friendliness. I'd bite my tongue off sooner nor be heard saying a word again awny member of the Order, Orange, Purple or Black, outside this house. We be to stick by other at this time, whatever we may think or say in private."

"Man dear, don't we know that?" cried his wife.

"Who is there here that would speak a word again any of the Order without it is in the way of friendliness? Isn't it the only protection that we'd have again them Nationalists if they got their blessed Parliament, that they'd all be ready to cut other's throats?"

"D'ye mind that, boy?" cried Mr. Alexander, pointing an arresting finger at his son. "D'ye mind that? Isn't that just what Willie Kinghan said this day?"

Jim nodded his assent; and his sister, for the first time since she had refused her herring, raised her head and showed some interest in the conversation—only for a few moments, however; then she assumed an air of greater indifference than ever; but the momentary lapse did not escape the observant eyes of her mother.

"And what was it that Willie Kinghan did say?" asked the latter, not even glancing in the direction of her daughter. "I always did feel that Willie would come well to the front when he saw his opportunity."

"He said just what you have been saying," replied her husband; "and he made them roar with the story he told of a friend of his own who went intill the House of Commons one day a month or two ago, and was left on the Terrace by the Member he had business with—there was a division or something that called him away. But when waiting, one of them Nationalists come up—one that he knew—and they had a chat. 'For the first time since the days of Parnell we're a united Irish Party, thank God—whatever minor differences we had in the past is sunk for ever,' said

he, 'and never again will we allow awnything to come betwixt us.' 'That's a pleasant condition of things,' said the other. Just then another Nationalist Member strolled by. 'Isn't that Mr. Regan?' asked the stranger. 'I wish you would introduce me, for I met a brother of his in Switzerland.' But the man he was talking till turned his head away, saying in a whisper, 'If it was awny other nor him I'd introduce you with pleasure; but that fellow Regan and me is not on speaking terms.' 'Oh, it doesn't matter in the least,' said the other; 'it was only that I saw Mr. Regan passing and I thought that I'd like for to tell him that I met his brother.' Well, they chatted away on other topics for a bit, and then Pat Keenan, the Member for Blarney, come up and dandered by. 'Isn't that Mr. Keenan?' enquired the stranger. 'Ay, it's him,' said the other a bit gruffly. 'Oh, this is good luck; he's the very man I wanted to see—he could tell me if the Blarney golf-links is eighteen holes. Do you mind introducing me till him?'. 'If it was awnybody else I'd do it with pleasure,' was the answer, 'but the fact is that Pat Keenan is a blasted swine and none of our Party will have awnything to do with him.' 'Oh, it doesn't matter in the least,' said the stranger. 'Only—I hope you'll allow me to congratulate you on being at last a truly United Irish Party.' Man, didn't the whole field roar as Willie Kinghan told the story? 'That's what it'll be in their Irish Parliament when they get it,' said he. 'They'll be ready for to cut other's throats for jealousy of other; and you know the old adage,' said he, '"When thieves fall out——"' Neat, wasn't it? Oh, he'll make his mark, the same Willie Kinghan."

Helen's mask of indifference had slipped from her while her father retold the tale, and at the close her eyes were bright, though she did not laugh so heartily as did her mother.

"It hits off them Nationalists till a T," said Mrs. Alexander. "They be to be tearing other to pieces when they get the chance."

But Jimmy Alexander shook his head.

"They've managed to vote pretty solid together for the past three or four years," said he. "That's what has kept the Government in power, as Willie Kinghan said."

"If it hadn't been for the Nationalists they would have been out of power long ago," said his father. "That was a clever touch of Willie's. An Englishman said till him, 'Why shouldn't you all in Ulster submit to be governed by the Nationalists? Haven't they been governing us in England for the past five years, and we haven't made a fuss about it?'"

"That took well too," said Jimmy. "There's no doubt that the law is a great help to a man in the way of public speaking."

"I had a chance of giving him a pat on the back before I come away," said Mr. Alexander. "I bid him come in and take pot-luck with us to-morrow, and he promised that he would if he could. You'll have to put your best foot foremost, my good woman, in the kitchen if you don't want us to look a pack of up-the-country Teagues with their praties and point for dinner. You may be sure that yon boy gets plenty of parties in Dublin. We be to show him that we're as good as them 'uns; eh, Helen?"

Helen laughed quite pleasantly now. She refrained

from pointing out to her father that he prided himself on being free from the least suspicion of pretence.

"It's just like you to ask a gentleman that you're particular about till dinner on Sunday and only mention it on Saturday evening," cried Mrs. Alexander. "Don't you know that there's not a cut of salmon nearer nor Belfast this day?"

"What about salmon?" said he contemptuously. "What do we want with fish at all at a Sunday's dinner? tell me that. Or if you be to have fish, lay down a dish of them fresh herrings fornenst him, and I'll go bail for him that he eats them. Salmon, indeed! Heth, you're a housekeeper and a half!"

Before Mrs. Alexander could reply to her husband's good-humoured taunt, Helen leant across a vacant chair to her, saying:

"Don't mind him, mother—him and his herrings. Can't you telephone to Belfast and get a salmon sent by the nine train? Ned will meet it at the station."

"We don't be to have salmon on a Sunday," said her mother. "There's a couple of fowl and a ham and cabbage with a pudding and strawberries. What more does anybody want?"

"Suppose that he stays to tea and supper—he has done that before he went to Dublin?"

"Can't he eat that cold tongue and salad—you've only had one slice off it?" asked her mother.

"Don't talk of such a thing—after what he has been used to in Dublin: I know that he dined with the Lawsons in Merrion Square," said Helen.

"What's all this talk about, awnyway?" cried her father. "It's a pretty house, so it is, if a neighbour

can't be asked in a homely way till a Sunday dinner without a fuss being made."

"Wasn't it yourself that went on about putting our best foot foremost in the kitchen?" said Mrs. Alexander.

"Was it me that mentioned the word salmon? I'll leave it till Jimmy here if the word salmon passed my lips."

CHAPTER V

THE usual family wrangle over nothing was interrupted by the entrance of the younger son, whose name was Edward. He was a tall, well-made fellow of twenty-five, with brown hair and grey eyes.

"Oh, you've arrived, have you?" said his mother, turning her attention to him and neglecting the offer of her husband to arbitrate on the salmon question.

"Yes, I've arrived—as hungry as a hawk," he replied, seating himself in the vacant chair. As he did so, Helen vacated hers and left the room. Both her father and mother knew that she had gone to settle the salmon question on her own account, and they knew also that she would have her own way in this matter whatever they might say.

"The herrings is cold by now, and the tea is overdrawn," said Mrs. Alexander; "but I can easy put hot water in the urn, and there's tongue—no, don't touch that tongue: it may have to do us for to-morrow night—you'll have to do with the cold ham."

"Cold ham; nothing better," said the young man. "Don't give me much tea, mother; fill it up with milk. That beast of a machine broke down with me again on the way to Ballyboye, and of course as it was the Twelfth there was nobody nearer than Belfast that could repair it for me, so I had to tinker it myself by the roadside."

"That's why you didn't turn up at the Demonstration, I suppose," said his father.

"It was enough, wasn't it?" said the son.

"It was quite enough; but I'd like to know what call had you for to start away on a machine like yon. Awnybody but a fool would know that it was bound to break down again. There's no good in them things whatever: they're toys, and when they throw a rider off and break his neck there's one fool less in the world," said Mr. Alexander.

"As much as to say it wouldn't have mattered if I had broken my neck," said Edward with a laugh. "Did you hear that, mother?"

"Oh, I heard it," said she. "But go you on with your tea and pay no heed till what he says by way of joking."

"He knows what I mean well enough without looking ontill your slate," said the father. "If it lay with you you'd have the boy gurnin' if ever an or'nary word was said till him. Motor-byke or not, he had no business for to be away from the Demonstration this Twelfth. People may begin to suspect that we're not all firm and united, and this is not the time for stragglers, whether they can afford motor-bykes or not. There was better men nor him that wasn't afraid to walk miles and miles to Ballyboye the day."

"I'm glad to hear that; it lets me know that there was plenty without me," said Edward mutteringly. "I'd be sorry if the Demonstration had to be put off because I didn't turn up."

"None of your jaw," said his father. "You try to excuse yourself by making an offer to be funny; but it won't go down here. Yon motor-byke is brave and

handy as an excuse, but it'll not be telling ye if it breaks down at the wrong time again."

"I never said it broke down at the wrong time," said the son.

"Hold your tongue, Ned," said his mother; adding to her husband, "Never heed him, James. Maybe he had to push yon machine a mile or two along the road, and wouldn't that be enough to make the best of us give a sharp answer? You're a sore tease, Ned"—she had returned to her son—"and it's not everybody that knows that you mean nothing. I wonder what that girl is doing about the salmon."

"What salmon is that?" asked Ned. "She needn't cook a salmon specially for me. This ham is first-rate. You told me not to touch the tongue and I obeyed you."

"You've enough of your own," muttered his father. "Ay, a deal too much."

"Give over that talk," said his wife soothingly. "The tongue is to be kep' for to-morrow night, Ned, in case Willie Kinghan that's coming till dinner may stay on to supper."

"Is Willie Kinghan coming to dinner?" he asked.

"He is. I wonder what that girl is doing about the salmon," said his mother. "I wouldn't put it past her to telephone to Belfast to send on a lump by the last train."

"Why salmon?" he asked.

"Helen has just set her heart on salmon for him—salmon is so genteel," replied his mother.

"If it comes, I've half a mind to throw it to the cats," said Mr. Alexander. "I don't want to let it get out that we're trying to be genteel. We're just

plain people with no nonsense about us, and we're not going to compete with Merrion Square in dinners, and them that doesn't like it can lump it."

"My machine is working all right now, and I'll go to the train for the salmon, if only for the sake of the cats," said Edward when his father had gone out by the French window to the garden.

"You'd best not let him see you go," remarked Jim, who had not spoken a word since the entrance of his brother.

"Oh, I don't mind," said Ned. "When a chap is mounted on a motor-byke that's a going concern he can stand a lot of bally-raggin'—three words of it is the most that he has a chance of hearing. Talking of ballyraggin', how did the Demonstration go off?—as usual, I suppose."

"Couldn't have been better," said Jim. "It was a pity you weren't there."

"I suppose it would have been better than tinkering at the machine on the roadside, five miles from anywhere," said Ned.

"Were you tinkering at it all the time?" asked his mother suddenly.

There was a pause before he said:

"Well, no; not exactly all the time. I worked at it for some time; then I got it started and it went on for a mile or two; but it began to missfire again and came to a standstill."

"Whereabouts?" asked his mother.

"About a mile from the cross-roads."

"Oh! What for didn't you wheel it on to Derryrush and leave it there?"

"That's just what I did. I wanted to leave it in the

stable and walk across by the old quarry to Ballyboye, but I found that by the time I got there the thing would be over, so I didn't start."

"And you've been there ever since?"

"I only got the thing in running order a quarter of an hour ago."

"And did you not get a bite of anything all day?"

"Oh, yes, Jack Power made me come in and share their dinner—corned beef and cabbage."

"I see. Are they all well?"

"All first-rate. I thought myself rather lucky on the whole. I might have had to push the machine seven miles home."

"Lucky? oh, ay. But if you take my advice you'll not let your father know anything of your luck."

"No fears."

The young fellow laughed shrewdly when he had spoken shrewdly. But his mother did not respond: she shook her head, and as if she meant that movement to change the subject, she said:

"I be to see if Helen has done anything about yon salmon. Maybe you'll have to meet the train with it after all."

"You bet that she has ordered it if Willie Kinghan is coming," said Edward, still in the shrewd way.

"She needn't bother her head," remarked the elder brother in an undertone.

"Why shouldn't she bother her head, pray, if so be that she pleases?" said the mother from the door.

There was a pause before James replied:

"She may if she pleases."

"Then what's the good of blatherin' about it as if you seen more'n other people?" said his mother.

She remained at the door for a few moments as if awaiting his answer; but he made her no answer. He knew that his silence would be more effective than anything that he could say: and all he wished to suggest was that he knew Helen would put herself to more trouble for the benefit of Willie Kinghan than for anyone else.

"Why did you say that she needn't bother her head?" asked the younger brother of the elder when their mother had shut the door.

"I didn't mean more than I said," replied James.

"Do you mean to say that Helen isn't good enough for Willie?"

"I mean nothing of the sort."

"Well, what the devil do you mean?"

"What business is it of yours? Doesn't everybody that has eyes and ears know that Willie Kinghan is gone upon Miss Thornton?"

"What does anybody know about it? Is Miss Thornton the sort of girl who would let any of the people about here know that she wanted to marry Willie Kinghan, or any other man, for the matter of that?"

"Did I say that she wanted to marry him? I said that it was him that was gone on her, and that's the truth."

"It's only one of your guesses. You've got nothing to go upon."

"Only my eyes and my ears."

"That's what I say—you've no more to go on than your eyes and your ears, and nobody thinks much of

them but yourself. Why shouldn't Helen have her chance if she should happen to set her heart upon Willie Kinghan ? "

"I don't want to stand by and see her make a fool of herself."

"Don't you indeed ? She'd only make a fool of herself if it was certain that Willie was engaged to someone else. Helen is every bit as pretty as Miss Thornton and every bit as nice a girl—three or four years younger too. And what about the money ? I'm sure that if it came to a question of marriage with the Kinghan family, father would stump up properly."

"It wouldn't be like him, but I don't say he wouldn't. What I do say is that the Kinghan people would never hear of him going to the Alexander family for a wife."

"And would he be such a mouth as to ask the leave of his people if he fell in love with Helen or anybody else ? What have his people got to do with it, I'd like to know ? And if it comes to that, what have they against us except that James Alexander rose from nothing, instead of its being that his father rose from nothing ? What are all the people about here who have mills—all the people about Belfast ? You know as well as I do that they are sprung from no better than ourselves, only maybe some of them have the start of a generation. What does it matter that our father and mother can't speak two sentences different from the accent of the mill hands ? However they may speak, they speak a deal better than even the best of the Belfast baronets ever did."

"That's not saying very much."

"No ; it's not ; but it's saying enough ; for didn't

Tommy Duffin marry the Honourable Kathleen Clanbracken, and if Lord and Lady Clanbracken didn't object to their daughter marrying the son of a man like Sir Daniel Duffin who spoke like a bog-trotter, why should a son of the Kinghans not marry a daughter of—of us—the Alexanders? The accents of father and mother put together would not be equal in breadth to the accent of Sir Daniel."

"It's not altogether the accent; everybody knows that there was a good deal that was suspicious about father's getting a hold of the mill at first."

"Oh, that's all rot. We've all heard things hinted at—his brother was bankrupt or something. There's nothing in that I'm sure—sharp practice? Oh, Lord! I'd like to know what business has succeeded without what they call sharp practice. I'd like to know what Government measure has been passed through Parliament during the past seven years without the exercise of sharp practice. I don't think anything the worse of father because he has played the game of business as it is played nowadays—I wonder if it was ever different—trying to look over the hands of the other players in the game—who minds that nowadays? What about the great firm that had to pay something like a quarter of a million to the American customs a while ago? Who thought the worse of them for that business? People only laughed, and said they fancied Jews could smuggle better than that."

"That's all very fine, Ned, but don't you mind when we were at school the thing about the mill would crop up every now and again?"

"I mind that I gave Dick Barber a black eye for something he said. Didn't we talk of all this long ago

and made up our minds that Dick had overheard the gossip of someone in Barber's Mill—the Barbers have always been jealous of us—I don't want to hear any more of it, and if you take heed of such thirty-year-old gossip, you'll be a fool."

"I don't take much heed of it; but let me tell you that you'll be a fool if you don't take more heed than you are doing just now of something else."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Man, haven't you eyes to see that both of the old ones suspect that there's something up between you and Kate Power?"

Ned turned round with a start. He had seen Helen crossing the garden and he was going to the window to open it for her. He started, and his face became red. He gazed at his brother without a word for some moments, and then said in a voice that was little louder than a whisper:

"That's what mother was hinting at when she was at the door, I suppose."

"Of course it was. She knew as well as me that your machine broke down accidentally on purpose at some place convenient to Derryrush."

"Did she and did you know all that? Well, you were both of you wrong. I had to wheel her a good mile and a half to Derryrush, and I'm telling you if you had to wheel her a mile and a half along that road you wouldn't say that she broke down very convenient to Derryrush."

James smiled horridly.

"A motor-byke is a convenient thing to ride anyway," said he. "It's easy to lay the blame of a breakdown upon its shoulders."

Edward cast a look at his brother which conveyed a good deal more than he would have had courage to say to him. Then he swung open one of the wings of the door giving upon the garden, and Helen entered.

"Will you really go to meet the train as mother says you promised?" she asked of Ned.

"Of course I will," he replied. "The machine broke down in the morning, but it's going all right now, and I'll do the six miles to Burncastle Station inside a quarter of an hour, and another quarter back. She travels, I can tell you, my girl."

"It's very convenient to have such a thing handy," said she. He glanced at James as he laughed. "What's he laughing at?" she asked of Ned.

"I dare say he is thinking of one of his own jokes: he doesn't make one often, but when he does he always laughs at it—nobody else does," replied Ned. "Did you order a whole salmon, and what weight is it likely to be?" he added.

"It will only be about six pounds," she replied. "What was Jim laughing at?"

"Don't mind him," said Ned. "He was saying that he had heard of a sprat being thrown to catch a salmon, but he supposed that upon occasions a salmon might be thrown to catch—well, a bigger fish. Let him alone. Come round with me to the shed and I'll show you what travelling is."

They went into the garden together and round to the shed beside the coach-house where the motor-bicycle was now reposing after having done all that was expected of it during the day; and Ned had expected a good deal.

CHAPTER VI

THE Sunday nearest to "the Twelfth" is a great church festival in many districts throughout Ulster. To several churches the Orangemen march, wearing the splendid regalia of the Order, while the turrets and spires of some of the sacred buildings are decorated with exactly the same orange and purple hangings as are to be seen every year, but at a different time, displayed upon the Roman Catholic Oratory in the Brompton Road, London—an extraordinary and almost unbelievable spectacle for the eyes of an Ulster Protestant. The religious discourses are decorated in the same chromatic spirit with large patches of orange and purple spread within a broad border of true blue. Orangeism is a religious belief adapted to the needs (assumed) of a great community that exists under extraordinary conditions in the North of Ireland, and its doctrines are preached with reasonable fervour and with a sense of conviction by its ministers of their wisdom and of their responsibility to maintain and to advance the welfare of their adherents. There is no mistaking the note of sincerity that rings through an anniversary sermon in the North of Ireland. It is the bugle note of the Scots Covenanters that reached the soul of the people whose descendants crossed the narrow water and founded the plantation of Ulster; and it is blown with no un-

certain sound from tower and steeple when the great victories won in Ireland on behalf of English Protestantism are being commemorated.

No true Protestant in Ulster neglects the anniversary services. Indeed the people of the province, whether Presbyterian or Episcopalian, have never forsaken the old church-going habit which their forefathers carried with them from Scotland and England; and like all communities who have maintained the habit, they feel that it covers a multitude of delinquencies. They take to heart such portions of the addresses as they feel apply to the situation of the moment, and go forth to discuss the value of the whole with the same relish as the Scots display every Sabbath over the discourses they have heard.

Mr. William Kinghan, barrister-at-law, did not walk from the church at Derryard with the people with whom he had promised to dine at the hour of half-past two, although some members of the family made some little attempt to shepherd him into their flock. He thought it more prudent, knowing as he did the tendency to gossip and to jump to conclusions that prevailed in the neighbourhood, to wait for Mr. and Mrs. Gifford, and accompany them to the Rectory, and after a chat of half an hour to make his way alone and unnoticed to the Alexanders' house. He was cautious; he thought it better on the whole not to make any move that might lend itself to misconstruction by the observant critics to be found in every village. He would have liked to walk from the church by the side of Helen Alexander if he had any means of announcing that he did so without prejudice. He could so protect himself when he was writing a letter bear-

ing upon any law case in which he was concerned; and he thought it was rather a pity that there was no way by which he could signify to the people about him that his walking from church by the side of Miss Alexander should not be regarded by them as significant of any intention on his part except that of partaking of a meal at her father's table. So cautious was he, in fact, that he was not sure that he would like even so much to be known as that it was his intention to dine with the Alexanders. He was well aware of the fact that the Alexanders were not regarded as on quite the same social level as the Barbers or the Bartons or the McMasters, all of whom were also mill-owners; and he could not doubt that if it were known that he was on terms of Sunday-dining familiarity with the Alexanders, some of his friends would frown or purse out their lips or shrug their shoulders; and as he thought over the matter during the greyer periods in Mr. Gifford's sermon, he almost came to the conclusion that he would have been wiser to have excused himself from accepting Mr. Alexander's invitation. But then he glanced across the aisle and saw Helen Alexander sitting under the eaves of a very becoming hat, between her two brothers, and he felt that she was distinctly good-looking, and although she had two brothers and a married sister, it was almost certain that she would have at least ten or fifteen thousand pounds of a fortune—by judicious negotiation, it might be arranged that she should receive it on her marriage and not at the death of her father—and the aggregate force of these considerations was to induce in him a feeling that, on the whole, he had not done wrong to accept the invitation: it was worth

the risk. He could give, without a consciousness that he might be better occupied, his undivided attention to Mr. Gifford's sermon.

Mr. William Kinghan was a barrister of some years' standing, and reported in the neighbourhood of Arderry to be "doing very well" in Dublin—so well that it was understood he had reasonable expectation of doing very much better for himself through the medium of politics—the most potent agency for advancement in Ireland. It was thought that he would run a very good chance of being selected to contest the mid-division of the county in the Unionist interest at the next election; and in this division selection by the Unionist Association only precedes election by the Unionist Constituency. He was the only son of Mr. Oliver Kinghan of Dearg House, the representative of an old Ulster family—old, that is, for Ulster, where few of the families are of more than a century's growth.

Dearg House occupies a most picturesque situation within view of Lough Neagh, but it is known to be mortgaged to the fullest extent, and the small yacht which Mr. Kinghan still maintains on the lake represents the limit of extravagance of the family. For a hundred and fifty years the Kinghans have been represented on the waters of Lough Neagh. At first, when their income was over ten thousand pounds a year, their vessel was a noble one, but now that the sum has been reduced by nine-tenths, the craft has dwindled down to a cutter of five tons. The Kinghans have been poor since the days of "the old Captain," whose name was a household word throughout Ulster, as representing all that was extravagant in the way of living. A reck-

less gambler, a mad rider, and a general spendthrift, he had unfortunately so fine a constitution that he had failed to kill himself before he had got rid of the greater part of his estate. His son, the present Mr. Kinghan, spent all his life trying to get enough out of the miserable residue to enable him to live; but everyone knew that he had a struggle to do so. The house and its little park gave evidence of this struggle. Mr. Kinghan was a struggler by profession. He had never been anything else all his life. He had been brought up to no other profession. His father might have been an Irishman, so complete was his contempt for having anything to do with money except spend it: he neither made it nor kept it, nor would he allow his son to do either—he would not even allow his son to spend it.

The position of such a man as Oliver Kinghan is a detestable one in Ulster. He is not sympathised with by the people about him who are making money. Some of them are insolent enough to pity him; the majority, however, simply ignore him. He counts for nothing in their estimation. An impoverished Irishman of good family living among his own people in any of the Irish provinces of Ireland gains rather than loses in respect, by reason of his condition. The peasantry touch their hats to him—those that have hats—and address him as "your honour," and the people of his own order, no matter how well off they may be, take good care that he is left out of none of their festivities. The Irish provinces of Ireland are the poor gentleman's Paradise. But it is very different in the northern province. Ulster is the poor gentleman's Purgatory and the Paradise of which he soon

tries to catch an occasional glimpse through the perspective glass of strong drink, he finds to be illusory—not soon enough to save himself. When he drinks himself to death his neighbours shake their heads, but neither in pity nor in blame. They simply shake their heads, and hasten to make more money.

The son of the wicked old Captain had never tried to see heaven reflected in a bowl of whisky punch, but his neighbours thought no better of him on this account; they thought it showed a rather poor spirit on his part to abstain from following the tradition of the neighbourhood. There were some who prophesied that the grandson of the old Captain would make up for the shortcomings of the intermediate generation; and they were somewhat surprised when he showed a tendency to be as industrious in his own way as they were in theirs. He wanted to go into business when he should leave the school that he attended in Belfast for a year or two; but a little stroke of luck, meaning money, that his mother had when the business question was being discussed, decided the matter. She insisted on his going to Uppingham—she had cast her eyes in the direction of Eton at first—and from Uppingham to Oxford. He had distinguished himself both at school and University more by diligence in study than in games; and in consequence he took a first-class degree and was called in terms of opprobrium "The Ulsterman", by his fellow-students, who did not study, but trained.

And indeed it seemed as if he had earned the name. He had developed many of the qualities of an Ulsterman, and, most prominently of all, the determination to get on. With the increase of years this determina-

tion became still more marked. He got on ; but he was shrewd enough to go to the Irish Bar rather than to the English. He was well aware that an English public school and Oxford University tell enormously in a man's favour in Ireland ; and he profited thereby ; so that at the age of thirty-two he was admitted, even by his friends in Ulster, to be doing very well at his profession ; and when it is understood in Ulster that an Ulsterman is doing very well, although it takes a great deal to persuade Ulster that there is any truth in the report, Ulster will always be ready to lend him a helping hand.

Willie Kinghan, knowing this, felt that he had a very good chance of becoming a Member of Parliament for the mid-division of his county when he would be in a position to lend his help to make Home Rule impossible.

It was under the influence of this aspiration that he had accepted Mr. Alexander's invitation to the 2.30 dinner at Ardreagh.

At the same time he would have been ready to admit that Helen Alexander was so pretty and so intelligent a girl that one could hardly believe that she belonged to the family—not a very complimentary admission to make in respect of the girl, and certainly not an extravagant one in respect of her family.

CHAPTER VII

THE salmon was excellent, and Jane, the cook, had given it every chance of asserting its own excellence without the adventitious aid of a piquant sauce. Mr. Kinghan had become so accustomed to associate every kind of fish with a certain sauce, that to find himself facing a fillet without such a foil conveyed to him the impression of something bordering on the indelicate. But if he blushed at the appearance of the fine nude salmon on the dish at the head of the table, it was with no deeper tint than that of the fish. There was something noble about it—it was Greek—austere—chaste—in its nakedness; a mayonnaise would have made it seem meretricious.

But, after all, there was a sauce—it was called a sauce by Mrs. Alexander—it was creamy white with chopped green leaves tinging it; they might have been of the parsley plant. He took some, and it convinced him that there was no nonsense about the Alexanders—his host had already mentioned this fact twice.

And there was really nothing so revolting after all in the liberality displayed by Mr. Alexander in helping the fish. At first the appearance of the thing on his plate made Willie Kinghan feel queer; but there was a certain refinement in Helen's voice that somehow neutralised every conflicting combination at the table,

and he took the potato that was offered to him and also the thickly cut cucumber.

And then Mr. Alexander, with many winks and equally sly touches of humour, related to him the story of how the salmon came to be on the table.

"I told them that I told you just pot-luck, Mr. Kinghan," said he; "but that wouldn't do for them. The missus accused me of just being like myself in inviting a gentleman to dinner the last thing on a Saturday and that Saturday the Twelfth into the bargain. But says I; 'Who's young Kinghan that we should make a fuss about him?'"

"Ah, who indeed?" said Willie with a laugh.

"That's what I said till them," said the host. "'Who's he anyway?' We had a dish of fried herrings for tea last evening, and I says till them, says I, 'Give him a couple of these 'uns if you must have fish, and if there's any sense in him he'll eat every bit o' meat on them herrings and smack his lips after.'"

"He be to talk his blathers, Mr. Kinghan," said Mrs. Alexander. "He said nothing like that. Everybody knows that we're just plain people; but Mr. Alexander knows that if I was to offer you or any other gentleman plain herrings, we wouldn't hear the end of it from him for a month. He disremembers what he says from one hour till another, so he does."

"Me disremember?" cried Mr. Alexander in an overdone mockery of amazement. "Me disremember? You know as well as me, my good woman, that I mind every word that passes my lips for as long as you please—a good bit longer nor pleases some people I could name when I bring them face to face with their own promises."

"It's Miss Alexander you be to thank for the salmon here," said the hostess, taking advantage of her husband's attacking his plate to get in a word of easy explanation.

"Then I thank Miss Helen most heartily," said Mr. Kinghan, smiling pleasantly at the girl, whose feelings he fully appreciated, with her father at one end of the table and her mother at the other. It was no wonder that she was by this time pinker than the fish that was being made the subject of such embarrassing explanations. "It is a magnificent fellow. What a nice little girl the Giffords' Maggie has become. I hadn't seen her for a year before to-day."

"She's a dear wee thing," said Helen, eagerly accepting the chance he offered her of breaking away from the ridiculous topic of the salmon. "Maggie and I are great friends," she added. "I do hope no attempt will be made to take the Giffords away from us."

"I think you may depend on Mr. Gifford's remaining here," said Willie. "He told me to-day that he had been approached by the St. Thomas's people in Belfast, but he had made up his mind to stay where he is; he likes the country, and I don't think he cares much about Belfast."

"I'm so glad," said Helen, and her mother echoed her words, only putting them into the common Ulster idiom.

"I'm quare and glad," was her expression, and it was perfectly intelligible to all at the table and behind it; but the parlourmaid would have accounted herself too genteel to make use of the phrase.

"That's the differs between the Church and the

Presbyterians," said Mr. Alexander, who, as an ambitious conversationist, felt that he was not doing himself justice. "Many's a good offer is refused by a Church clergyman, but when did you ever hear of a Presbyterian 'call' being rejected?"

"I heard of Mr. Williamson at Greyrock," said Edward. "Isn't it true that he stayed on at Greyrock after he had got a call from Bengore?"

"It's quite true: he found that the stipend was five pounds more at Bengore, and he began to write his farewell sermon to the Greyrock congregation; for he hadn't heard tell that there was no manse at Bengore. By good luck he got the news before it was too late, and after prayerfully considering the 'call' he came to the conclusion that it was his duty to stand by his old friends."

"It wasn't a trunk 'call'; he found that he had been switched on in error," suggested Edward.

Mr. Kinghan smiled indulgently. He knew better than to say a word that could possibly be interpreted as a sneer at the Presbyterians and repeated as such. He hoped to address many meetings of Presbyterians during his canvass of the Parliamentary Division. Indeed, his great regret was that he could not be both a Presbyterian and an Episcopalian at the same time; he knew that he could not; but at any rate he could make an honest attempt to be the most Presbyterian Episcopalian possible; but in order to follow the Apostolic advice to make his calling and election sure —especially his election—he would not have taken active steps to set anyone right who might refer to him (in a Presbyterian district) as a Presbyterian by choice, though born an Episcopalian. In Ulster it is

assumed that a person may be of one religion by birth and another by adoption.

"I think Mr. Williamson was quite right to stay at Greyrock," said Helen firmly. It seemed as if she appreciated with some measure of accuracy the delicate position of a Parliamentary candidate in a constituency so constituted as was the mid-division.

"We all think that he was right, so we do," said her father, smiling shrewdly.

"The sequel proved that he was right," said Jim; "for didn't his people get up a bazaar to build on an addition to his manse at Greyrock?"

"Yes; and I'm not ashamed to say that I sent some work to it," said Helen.

"No more am I ashamed that my name appeared in the subscription list," cried her father. "What call had I to be ashamed of it? I have some good customers at Greyrock."

"It's necessary for all Protestants to stand firm at the present crisis—to sink all minor distinctions of doctrine and to—to—stand firmly together," said Mr. Kinghan with a suspicion of a first-class electioneering manner.

"That's the true spirit, sir," cried Mr. Alexander. "I hope you'll say that some day on a public platform."

Ned restrained himself from expressing his belief that Mr. Kinghan would say it several times again on many platforms. He knew for certain that he had said it several times before. But Ned said nothing.

"It's only betwixt us and the Catholics there can never be any pretence of an alliance," continued Mr. Alexander. "Glad I was to hear tell of what they

done at St. Timothy's Church at Belfast only last month. There was a vacancy for the post of organist, and a fellow that's a Papist applied for it and another that's a Jew. Well, though the first was a far more competent man, the vestrymen appointed the Jew. That was a slap in the face to the Home Rulers, and I was glad to hear tell of it."

"But surely they could have found a Churchman capable of acting as organist," suggested Mr. Kinghan.

"How is this it was they didn't do it, Jim?" said Mr. Alexander, turning to his elder son. "I heard the reason why, but I disremember."

"It was a foolish thing," replied Jim. "The fact was that the man who has got the chief voice in St. Timothy's Vestry is Mr. Hamilton, and he is the chief partner in Martin, Hamilton and Co. It was he who got young Bates appointed organist five years ago. Young Bates was cashier in Martin and Hamilton's office, and the thirty pounds a year that he was paid as organist of St. Timothy's Mr. Hamilton docked off his salary as cashier."

"That wasn't so unreasonable when you come to think that young Bates never would have got the post of organist if it hadn't been for Mr. Hamilton," said Mr. Alexander.

Mr. Kinghan looked as if he were not quite sure about the sweet reasonableness of the transaction. The expression on his face was that of the doctor who thinks he would like a second opinion, and meanwhile reserves his own.

"It wasn't until Mr. Hamilton and he had a row and he went off to a good berth in Manchester that Alfred Bates let out what Mr. Hamilton had done, and the

two church organists who would have had a chance of the vacant post refused to apply for it," said Jim. "I thought they were great fools."

"That's the way with them musicians," said Mr. Alexander. "They don't seem capable of looking at anything from a business standpoint. They're as huffy as trades unionists nowadays—only too ready to jump at a chance of taking offence at something and throwing down their tools."

Mr. Kinghan shook his head in a way that he trusted would be regarded by his host as sympathetic, but there were so many trades unionists in the Division he thought it better to express no opinion by word of mouth. Words are so easily repeated; but one cannot repeat a sympathetic shake of the head—at least he was sure that Mr. Alexander could not do so.

And then he turned to Miss Alexander and asked her—the organist anecdote did not seem to give the question an air of abruptness—if she had heard that Melba was to sing at the opening concert of the Philharmonic in the Ulster Hall.

She had not heard this piece of news, but she hoped it was true. She had once heard Madame Melba and thought her simply splendid. She considered it a shame that the theatre was so badly supported in Belfast: no chance was given to anyone to hear an opera unless one went to Dublin; and for her part she loved opera; but she supposed that Verdi was old-fashioned; she didn't care; of course there was the overture to *Tannhäuser;* it was lovely, still——"

"What's the girl talking about anyway?" cried her father. "I'm say'ng, Susan, where has she picked up all of that kind of old talk?"

"It's new talk that I call it, so I do," replied the lady. "But why shouldn't she talk like that if she can? Didn't she get the very best ejucation that money could buy? What for are you scarred if it shows itself now and then?"

"Like murder, ejucation will out, I suppose," said he.

But Helen had ignored his attempt to join in the conversation and her mother's *sotto voce* explanation to him; she continued to express herself freely to Mr. Kinghan on the subject of the lyric stage. She was on the side of Grand Opera as opposed to the various chirrupy things that they called musical comedies, and Mr. Kinghan cordially agreed with her as to their comparative merits; though her brothers thought that the music of the *Merry Widow* would take a deal of beating by anything in the Carl Rosa répertoire.

"It would be safer not to talk of beating in this connection," said Mr. Kinghan. "Beating is an obsolete process of the spring cleaning: the vacuum cleaner does the work far more thoroughly by a more persuasive process. So it is in dealing with a question of art: criticism by flagellation is far less effective than that by persuasive comment."

What he meant was not at once apparent to all at the table; of course, Helen was the first to break the pause that followed his measured phrases.

"I agree with you, Mr. Kinghan," she said. "Of course, it is as ridiculous to talk of one piece beating another as it is to compare *Romeo and Juliet* with *Charley's Aunt*."

"I'd rather go to see *Charley's Aunt* any day," said Ned.

"The vacuum cleaner that a body hears tell of so much nowadays is too new-fashioned for me," said Mrs. Alexander. "I never could abide yon inventions for the lazy. How can you possibly get the dust properly out of a carpet without beating it soundly first and then thrailing it along the grass? How is a body to know that the dust is out of it unless you see it in the air. 'Seeing is believing' is an old saying; but there's a deal of truth in it."

Mr. Kinghan gracefully acquiesced. He did not hold a brief for the vacuum cleaner.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was very discouraging, not to say depressing, Helen thought, to have her father and mother insisting upon obtruding themselves upon the chat which she and Willie Kinghan were having together. Why could they not talk among themselves about things they understood, and leave her and Willie to continue their conversation on matters that were above the heads of the rest of the table? If they had only the sense to keep quiet—no, she did not even ask them to keep quiet, only not to insist on blundering in and showing their ignorance! She felt herself alternately becoming hot and cold as her father and mother thrust themselves into the conversation. Her father made her feel cold, her mother hot.

"But Willie Kinghan is a perfect gentleman," she thought after the fifth or sixth attempt to exclude her parents—she only wanted to shut them out, not to shut them up—"he never once even smiled at their blunders."

And because Helen only made her feelings apparent by the changes of her complexion, Willie Kinghan felt that she was a nice girl. Not once did she betray the jarring upon her of the complacent solecisms of her parents, except by a little flush or a tiny frown. He admired her for her self-control. He had had many chances of observing the domestic tragedy of the edu-

cated child of the illiterate household: he had lived in Ulster for thirty years. He knew that if it should be possible for him to so much as hint to Helen that he thought her parents must be something of a trial to her, she would have flared up and told him that they were as good as he was, and if any trial was connected with them, she had no mind to employ him as counsel for the prosecution. He admired her greatly.

And poor Helen was wishing with all her heart all the time that he had not accepted her father's invitation. She felt sure that the frightful lack of refinement in everything incidental to the meal could have only one effect upon him, this taking the form of a resolution never to cross the threshold of Ardreagh again. Why, even the salmon which she had meant to have a sort of indefinite influence for the better upon the dinner-table, chastening the rude impression likely to be produced by the appearance of such a monstrosity as a whole ham, plentifully garnished with common cabbage, had been so dealt with by the heavy hand of her father that it seemed actually lower in the social scale than the fried herring that follows hard upon the odour of its cooking into the dining-room!

And this was not all. She had superintended the production of a trifle—a thing of sponge cakes and strawberry jam made moist with brandy, flavoured with almonds and flooded with custard—and this was placed before her mother, while the raspberry tart was before her father; and yet he could not let the thing be, but must needs make it the subject of his coarse jocularity, sniffing at it across the table, and saying that he expected a second helping would be

enough to send anyone under the table. And he would insist on clinging to the idea of intoxication as fervently as a threadbare comedian does to it in an old play—nay, he went so far as to simulate the effect after partaking of a single spoonful!

And yet she sat mute, though her brothers laughed, and Ned affirmed that if the thing had been made with whisky his father would have eaten it out of its dish, leaving nothing for anyone else. This, she believed, would give the *coup de grâce* to her chance of ever sitting again by the side of Willie Kinghan at her father's table—perhaps at any table. She did not know a great deal about the dinners in the aristocratic region of Merrion Square, Dublin, but she could imagine a good deal; and she had somehow received the impression that they were among the most refined ceremonies of which Society took cognisance. It was clearly understood that Mr. Kinghan was an habitual diner in Merrion Square, where at least one judge with a fine Ulster accent resided, and coming straight from one of those tables to that at which he was now sitting, what would he think?

She believed that she could define his impressions, and she was sure that if she was even partially correct, she would never see him again at Ardreagh.

It was a great relief to her when the strawberries and cream brought the meal to a close.

"I don't know how awnybody can sup that mixture after a good dinner," was her father's comment when the dessert plates were put upon the table.

"Sup"—"sup" strawberries and cream!

The horrid word which is so dear to Ulster Scots was the last straw. Who could ever voluntarily sit at a

table where there was a chance of hearing someone talk of supping strawberries and cream? She rose even before her mother looked in her direction and passed out to the garden.

"You'll not be hurrying off before tea-time, Mr. Kinghan," said Mrs. Alexander, following her.

"No fears," said her husband. "Him and me be to have a talk that'll last a while. He'll not be for church this evening."

Mr. Kinghan smiled his assent, only uttering a few words of grateful protest.

"Quite too kind," he murmured, as he held the glass door of the garden open for his hostess to pass through.

"Don't you gentlemen stay too long over your wine," said she, glancing back. "I know I can trust you, Mr. Kinghan, but yon man never knows when to stop when there's a wineglass fornenst him."

"I'm glad that we're alone and can talk freely," said Mr. Alexander. "What's your poison? You can take your choice—port, sherry, or claret wine—all warranted sound."

"I'm a poor hand at the bottle," said Willie. "If you will allow me—I think that is Apollinaris—I think that's the best for a day like this."

"It all depends on how much whisky you add to it," said his host. "Mix yourself a stiff 'un. It will help you to digest the salmon. Yes, Mr. Kinghan, I'm glad to have an opportunity at last of telling you that your speech yesterday was a first-class one and well to the point. Yon fella, Joe Campbell, is always pushing himself for'ard—he got aholt of you as soon as Lord Innisfallen had managed to shunt him off,

and I hadn't a chance of a word with you after that. He needs keeping in his place."

"Oh, the Twelfth is still the Twelfth," laughed Willie; "and he is a Grand Master, I think."

"He's a grand thruster," said Mr. Alexander. "But, as you say, it's as well to keep in with everybody. Not but what you'd do well enough without the help of Joe Campbell or such-like, for it's men like you that's wanted just now. We're none too well off for good men for the cause, Mr. Kinghan."

"But they're all good men and true, the Unionists of Ulster," said Willie.

"They are that—staunch and true, sir; but we need more nor to be staunch and true to cawmbat with the clever rascals that's again us. Where would we be this day if it wasn't for Carson and Smith? It goes to my heart to be led by a man with a Southern accent—a regular Nationalist accent—like Carson's. When I heard him speak on a platform for the first time I'm danged if I didn't think it was a Redmondite that had got in by mistake. Do you tell me that they don't mind that Irish brogue of his at the meetings in England?"

"On the contrary, they like it," replied Willie. "And now you come to think of it, wouldn't you say that his Irish brogue was a great help to our side? There he is, you see, a real Irishman, brogue and all, and yet strong against Home Rule! Oh, yes, his brogue is one of the most valuable assets of the Unionist Party."

"I never looked at it in that light before," said Mr. Alexander musingly. "I would never trust a man with a brogue like yon—that's what I thought when I

heard him first, and that's what a lot of us in Ulster thought, I warrant ye. Us in Ulster's quare and partic'lar about our accent, as you well know, Mr. Kinghan. We've a quare liking for them that speaks English, but as you know, we can't thole the Irish brogue."

"I know that," said Willie, not smiling, though James and Edward Alexander on the other side of the table were smiling. "I know what they think of a Dublin jackeen in Belfast; but I'm not sure that the soft Southern pronunciation isn't pleasanter to listen to than our hard Ulster."

"That's the worst of it," said Mr. Alexander. "I'll warrant ye that the devil spoke with an Irish brogue in the Garden of Eden when he blarneyed Eve into eating the apple; it's got a quare sootherin' way about it—it's the accent of a deceiver. You couldn't imagine blarney spoken with an Ulster accent."

Willie Kinghan laughed this time.

"I quite agree with you," he said. "Whatever faults we may have the blarney is not among them."

"We're too straightforward, that's what we are," continued Mr. Alexander. "We don't pretend to be anything but what we are."

"There's no need," put in Edward; "for we don't think that anybody can be better than an Ulsterman."

His father looked at him searchingly before he said:

"I don't know whether you mean to be making fun or not, but if you can tell us where any better nor an Ulsterman is to be found I'd thank you for the information. There's nothing of the smooth, deceitful palaver of the Irish about us, and there's nothing of

the 'haw-haw' Englishman about us. But somehow we're badly in want of good speakers. I doubt if any of us would go down so well with an English audience as Carson."

"I agree with you," said Willie, shaking his head mournfully.

"It's a dang shame, but it's a fact," said Mr. Alexander. "That's why every man that knows anything is ready to welcome you on a platform, Mr. Kinghan. You're a crule good speaker, sir, when wonst you let yourself go, and it'll not be our fault if we don't make a place for you as Member for some Division of the County, or maybe of Belfast itself. Belfast hasn't been over lucky in its Members for the past thirty or maybe forty years. They've mostly been good enough men, but we want more nor a good enough man; we want a man that can make the Nationalists feel in hell—that's the man we want—a man that can hold his own again Redmond and Winston Churchill, the conceited pup, or Lloyd George, the financier who, after pocketing thirty thousand pounds of pay, forbye quitting a good business as an attorney and getting a good price for it, hasn't managed to save more from all than gives him four hundred a year! We want a man that'll not be afraid to show up the lies and hypocrisy of that crew that has sold the British Empire to them that was pronounced by the greatest English judges to be criminal conspirators. Is there no voice among our representatives to quote from the finding of the Parnell Commission? 'Members of a criminal conspiracy'—I mind the words well; and the most of the men who were so branded, are the same men that have been dictating to the

Government what they are to do and what they are not to do."

"Yes; without the support of the Nationalists the present Government would not remain in office for a week," said Mr. Kinghan.

"Man dear, I'm quoting your own words," cried his host. "You put it brave and neat at the meeting yesterday, so you did, when you told them of the man that said he couldn't see why Ulster should object to be governed by the Nationalists when all England had been submitting to it for some years without such a grumble as would sound like a brattle of thunder to shake the Redmondites and their allies, the present Government, from their seats. We hope to hear more of this from you, Mr. Kinghan. We must admit that we stand sore in need of men that isn't afeard to speak out, and to speak out the truth with an Ulster accent. There's no way that the truth sounds so forcible as when it's spoken with an Ulster accent."

"There's no way that it sounds nastier, I think," remarked Ned, in a low voice, as if speaking to himself.

His father turned upon him.

"You mean that for a contradiction," said he, "but it's not a contradiction. We want to make it as nasty as we can for the Nationalists, and the closer we stick to the truth the nastier it'll be for them. There you are, my fine gentleman, with your sneers at the Ulster accent—crushed by a word or two."

"I feel a worm, so I think I'll wriggle away into the garden, if you don't mind," said Edward with a laugh.

"None of us will mind in the least; and there's no call for you to hurry back without you want to hear

more wisdom in an hour than you'll get going round the country on your motor-cycle in a year," cried his father.

Ned made his escape; whistling a stave or two of "Boyne Water"; and there was something of envy in Willie Kinghan's eyes as he watched him.

"He's all right, if a bit pert now and again," said his father apologetically. "What was I saying?—Oh, ay: I mind now—about our Members. Ay, it's a long time since we had a man that could make a speech to sting them as Colonel Saunderson used. If Saunderson was alive now and if poor Chamberlain was his old self again, we wouldn't hear much about a gang of Nationalists ruling the Empire. To be sure, there was Johnston of Ballykilbeg, but when he got the Party Processions Act repealed he shut up. Of course, Harland was a great shipbuilder, and so was Wolff; but what were they in the House of Commons? Oh, ay, Belfast has always sent dummies to Parliament since the days of Cairns, forty odd years ago—dummies, or worse. Didn't they turn out Sir J. P. Corry, who was a man that everyone respected, and put in his place a ruffin who called himself de Cobain? He was kicked out of the House and afterwards got eighteen months in gaol. And then there was an Islandman by the name of Sloan—he started another Orange Order! A pretty lot to represent the third port in the United Kingdom!"

"I know that our side has never been adequately represented," said Willie. "It is a great pity."

"Heth, and it *is* a great pity; and the worst of it is, that because we're weak in speakers the notion is apt to spread in England that our cause is equally weak.

Well, it may be left for us to show them that there's something that's more staggering than the best speech that was ever made. An army of eighty thousand good men and true! It's the brave speech that comes from the muzzles of a thousand machine-guns and eighty thousand rifles!"

"There will be no need for us to fire a shot," said Willie. "Whom would we fire upon? Who would fire upon us? Union Jacks will never fire upon Union Jacks. It will be to the House of Commons in Westminster that I shall be returned, not to the one in College Green."

"Those premises is already occupied by the Bank of Ireland; but that would be no trouble to the Nationalists if they wanted the building, for if Home Rule was passed the Bank of Ireland and every other outside Ulster might close their doors. The very shadow of Gladstone's Home Rule Bill in '86 brought down every Irish stock to the extent of twelve millions; but the real thing would mean the annihilation of every Irish security in the market. By the living Jingo, it would mean the ruin of most English securities, so it would. I'm telling you what I know. How many millions have gone out of England since Lloyd George and his Nationalists took to ruling the country? Go to any good stockbroker and he'll tell you—leastways he'll tell you what every client he has bids him do every day of the week. Take the case of myself. I had a very good year's business—I'm not bragging, as you know——"

"Of course not," said Willie decisively.

"I found myself with four thousand pounds more or less to invest," continued the host; "and every

penny of it went into something foreign—not even Colonials—who the mischief can say where this breaking up of the Empire will end ?—the Colonies are not safe—nothing is safe so long as that tag-rag and bobtail rule the country ; I'd rather buy the stock of some of them South American republics, so I would : I've ten thousand in Argentines, so I have. It took me half an hour finding out on the atlas where one railway was that I put five hundred into—debentures, of course—I had a notion that it was in the Southern States of North America, but I found that it was in the Northern States of South America. The President may be a robber and an adventurer, but I trust him sooner than Lloyd George."

He brought down his clenched hand upon the table, making the decanters ring and the glasses to be visibly affected.

"I wonder how much longer you gentlemen are going to be. James, you should be ashamed of yourself, kicking up such a shindy on a Sunday," came the voice of Mrs. Alexander from the garden door. It was more startling in its effect than Mr. Alexander's banging of the table. Willie got upon his feet, succeeding in giving an apologetic aspect to the movement.

"It's past four o'clock that it is, and quare and warm. I bid Helen go till you 'uns a while back, but she said to let you be ; if you preferred your own compäny till us, we were quite happy by weerselves," continued the lady.

"I'm quite ashamed," said Willie.

"Woman dear, do ye fancy that he came here to listen till the gossip of the whole townland ? " asked her husband.

"I think you might give the Home Rule question a rest one day in the week," said she.

"You think yourself clever, Mrs. Alexander," said her husband genially; "but I'd like to know how you come to fancy that we were at the Home Rule question."

"I knew it by the thump you give the table," she replied.

They all laughed, her husband loudest of all.

"And they say that women have no gumption, Mr. Kinghan," said he, rising and giving a twitch to his coat and a jerk to the lower part of his waistcoat. "Well, you've guessed right for wonst, my dear; and please God, that, Sunday and all as it is, there's a thousand other tables in Ulster being thumped at the present moment in the same spirit."

"You see, there was no Orange drum handy, Mrs. Alexander, so he was forced to make use of the nearest substitute. The sentiment was one that only an Orange drum could do justice to," said Willie, going to the open door. The sound of a blackbird's note came from the shrubbery.

"Hould on a minute to I learn ye what the Unionists' tables be calling out when they're rapped this day—listen till it." He bent over the table and began thumping it with alternate fists. "Listen till thon," he cried, "'Come and do it—Come and do it—Come and do it'—That's what the Unionists' tables is calling out this day."

He finished with such a series of thumps that the gas globes over the table gave back complementary notes to those that rang from the wine-glasses.

"For any sake, come into the garden before some

mischief bees done," cried the lady. "Unionism is Unionism, but spare us the wine-glasses. Come on, Mr. Kinghan; you've had quite enough of Unionism for a quiet Sunday. Yon's Miss Alexander under the trees. If you go till her at wonst maybe she'll forgive you for listening till himself blatherin' away at Home Rule."

CHAPTER IX

MR. KINGHAN remained for tea at the Alexanders'; but before the meal was served he had an opportunity afforded him of inspecting the garden under the guidance of Helen. It was like most villa gardens in that part of Ireland—a mass of annuals, neatly bedded out, and making an excellent show of colour, but without any particular colour scheme being adopted in their arrangement. The roses, however, were magnificent; for Arderry is the centre of the country that gives to the world year by year such roses as soon appear in every catalogue that holds out its allurements to the sanguine rose-grower.

She gave him, at his request, one of the loveliest of the new season's buds, and he thought he might even go so far as to offer her the button-hole lapel of his coat for its reception; but there was a sort of "without prejudice" air in the act that prevented her from doing her part of the transaction with the self-conscious simper of the untrained coquette: and afterwards they had strolled about the garden together, talking about many matters in which they were both interested, and now and again about some acquaintance which they had in common. He wondered if she would attempt to make an apology for the vulgarity of her parents. More than one highly schooled (not highly educated) girl in the neighbour-

hood had been foolish enough to try to excuse the provincialisms of a father or a mother; but Helen made no reference to the pronunciation or the hybrid idioms of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander; and he was ready to applaud her good taste—or at least her absence of bad taste—in this particular.

But when they had reached the garden seat at one end of a rose pergola the girl lowered her voice to a confidential pitch, and said:

"Do sit down for a minute, Mr. Kinghan: I have something to say to you, and I may not have the opportunity again."

She seated herself and he took a place beside her. There was an air of mystery in the utterance of her half-whispered words that suggested to him the need for all his Ulster caution.

"Are you sure that I am the best person to hear what you have to say, Miss Alexander?" said he.

"I am quite sure," she replied. "When I heard that you were coming to lunch to-day—I mean to dinner—I was very glad, for one can say things much better than write them."

"Much better. Take my advice, Miss Alexander, never put pen to paper if you can possibly avoid it."

"I certainly would not in this case, unless to you. You are the only person whose opinion I would like to abide by."

"I feel honoured."

"You needn't. Don't you know the sort of people whom I know about here? Is there one of them whose opinion is worth anything? They are full of prejudices, and they know nothing of the world."

"I'm not so sure of that. They are long-headed, far-

seeing people in our neighbourhood. However, we won't stop to discuss them. I am here, and I shall do my best to serve you."

"I'm certain you will. Well, the fact is, Mr. Kinghan, I'm very much afraid that Edward is making a bit of a fool of himself."

"Is it possible? I have always looked on him as a hard-headed chap. It can't be in connection with the mill—he has the reputation for being the most astute manager in the neighbourhood; and didn't he invent something?"

"It's not in connection with the business; it is about—a girl."

"Oh!"

"Yes, indeed. You may have seen or heard of Miss Power of Derryrush."

"I have seen her, but never met her—a pretty girl in some ways. The Powers are Catholics."

"That's it. They're all Catholics but not bigoted; but bigoted or not, it's all the same. If Edward were to marry her or any Catholic, father would turn him out of the house. You should hear the way he talks of the Powers."

"They are the only Catholics and Home Rulers in our neighbourhood. Michael Power is looked on as a curiosity. Any person might live for years in Ulster without once setting eyes on a Home Ruler. I don't think I ever spoke to one until I went to Dublin. Dear me! This is a rather disagreeable thing. He cannot possibly marry her—but for that matter, she would never be allowed by her people to marry him. But are you quite sure that there is really anything serious between them? She is a pretty girl, and he

may have been attracted to her for a time—a sort of harmless flirtation. He must see—they must both see—how impossible it would be that anything but disappointment—ruin—could come of a serious affair between them."

"It's more than a mere flirtation—I am certain of that, but perhaps if it were taken in time——"

When she paused, he smiled.

"You think it might be like other diseases—it may yield to timely treatment?" he said.

"I do; and what I want to ask of you is to tell me what is judicious treatment in this case. You know what a strong Orangeman father is, and he wants us all to be as strong as he is."

"He believes as everyone whose opinion is worth anything believes, that Home Rule would mean not only Home Rule, but home ruin as well. I am as strong on this point as he could be. James was at the Demonstration yesterday, but Edward was absent.

"He pretended to set out for the field on his motor-cycle and he only returned at tea-time with a long story about how it broke down. He spent the day at Derryrush—and it the Twelfth too! The idea of any son of James Alexander spending the Twelfth in a house full of Catholics!"

Mr. Kinghan shook his head gravely.

"It would be a blow to your father."

"He would simply turn Ned out of the house and disown him," said she. "I know that he would do that, and that's just how I find myself in a difficulty and in great need of the advice of someone like yourself, Mr. Kinghan—a real friend—I feel that I can trust you—

that all of us can trust you to give us the best advice what to do."

"You can depend on my doing my best for you. I wonder if Edward has any idea that you suspect what is going on."

"I have given him a hint that I do. But, as you know, in such a neighbourhood as this, nobody can keep anything secret for any length of time. People about here are like spies, but they have nothing to talk about—no topic, I mean—nothing beyond Home Rule; they read no books, they have no taste in music or in pictures or in anything that occupies the attention of people elsewhere—in Dublin or London. I spent a month in Dublin with the Rowands in the early part of the year, and I never once heard the word Home Rule mentioned unless in the way of a jest—it was all the Carl Rosa opera, the Moody-Manners, the music at the cathedrals, the concerts, the theatres, and the plays at Abbey Street, which the people in London thought represented real Irish life—oh, I found that month in Dublin simply heavenly, so different from Belfast!"

She had wandered somewhat from the point on which he had questioned her. He had simply enquired if she thought that her brother suspected her of suspecting him of an attachment to Kate Power, and she had scarcely answered him, but had rushed into a comparison of Dublin and Belfast. He brought her back to his question.

"If you were to give him a broader hint, do you think he would be warned?" he asked.

She became thoughtful.

"I really could not say," she replied after a pause.

"I rather think that he would tell me to mind my own business. People are not so polite here as they are in Dublin."

"Politeness has never been one of our Ulster failings," said he. "But if he would say that to you who are his sister, what would he say to me if I ventured to interfere?"

"Oh, I didn't mean that you should reason with him," she cried. "I only wanted you to tell me if you think I should prevent a dreadful row by telling my father or mother what I suspect. I had an idea that it would be better for all of us if the affair were put a stop to before it went on any further."

"So it would," he said; "but the question is, would it be possible to put a stop to it without a frightful family row? I think on the whole it would be best for you not to say anything about the affair just now. Ned is old enough to take care of himself, and, as you say, if he continues paying his visits to the Powers, people will begin to talk about it and it will not take long to come to your father's ears."

"He will turn Ned out of the house."

"Not he. All that he will do is to forbid him to go to the Powers' and threaten to turn him out if he does. That will bring matters to a climax."

"Do you think that Ned will submit?"

"I am pretty sure that he will—after a while."

"But if he really is in love with Kate Power?"

"I don't think he can be really in love with her. But if he is, I think he will find it easier to give her up than to give up all that he may look for from his father. He would not like to be cut out of his father's will or to be turned out of his father's house."

"Of course not, but—are men always ready to be dictated to by prudence in matters of love?"

"Not always, and not all men. But I think that in Ulster most men are too hard-headed to make fools of themselves over what's called a love affair. Most of them are ready to look at facts in the face, and they know that a prudent marriage is everything, but a mixed marriage is seldom other than a failure. Ned knows perfectly well that to marry Miss Power would mean his ruin—social as well as financial. He would get nothing from your father, and he would be shunned by all your friends. The Powers are not on a social level with the people who visit you and whom you visit."

She rose from her seat after a little space of silence.

"Thank you," she said. "I feel greatly relieved now that I have confided in you. I knew that it would be so. I have no one about here whom I could talk to so freely as I do to you. You are so different from the gentlemen we meet in this neighbourhood. You have been to Oxford."

"Oxford is not everything, Miss Alexander."

"Oh, I know how much it means to a gentleman. Trinity College is all well enough in its way—I have met several very nice gentlemen in Dublin who have only been at Trinity College; but it's only at Oxford you get the real thing. Thank you again. If I may, I will write and tell you how things go on; you may be able to give me some more advice should I find myself in a difficulty."

"I shall only be too happy, if you think I can be of the least help to you."

"But really I don't like bothering you: you have

so much to think of. Everybody says you are making a name for yourself; and there can be no doubt that you will be the next Member for the Division."

"I would be very busy indeed if I could not spare an hour to such a friend as you, Miss Alexander."

Under the influence of a sudden impulse, she put out her hand to him quickly, but without speaking a word. He pressed it, saying with a smile:

"It is a compact. If you accept my poor services, they are at your disposal."

"You have lifted such a weight from my shoulders! I feel that I am no longer alone."

She spoke very nicely, in a voice of half-whispered earnestness. He felt that she was a very pretty girl, and he was glad to be on such a friendly footing with her. He would see more of her before he returned to Dublin. He was sure that she would have twenty or twenty-five thousand pounds at her father's death—perhaps even at her marriage. He made up his mind that he would see more of her—in certain eventualities. The nice girls whom he occasionally met in Dublin, at dinners in Merrion Square and elsewhere, were not usually heiresses. Undoubtedly Ulster was the province where money was to be found—and money is useful.

But he would not stay to supper at Ardreagh, though Mrs. Alexander did her best to persuade him, holding out the allurement of a chaste menu, the items in which she enumerated, mentioning that the tongue was only deficient by one insignificant slice; and though Mr. Alexander suggested the possibility of a bottle of champagne with a lump of ice in it to make the comestibles "slither down." He laid great emphasis upon the lubricant qualities of the champagne.

introducing the word "slither" once more in spite of the visible shudders of his daughter, who had been taught at the very high-class school in Belfast where she had been educated, that every provincialism, even one of Ulster, was vulgar, and that the most offensive of all was the word "slither," especially when it referred to the motion of masticated food down the throat, or to the descent of a lady from her carriage—the application of the word she knew to be common to both operations in Ulster. Her schoolmistress, being genteel, abhorred even so expressive a bit of vernacular as the word "slither."

But Ned Alexander had observed the shudder of his sister, and having a suspicion of what was the framework of her conversation with their visitor at the foot of the garden, was determined to keep the word in the family, and said, when Mr. Kinghan had gone down the avenue:

"I wonder where he's slithering off to for supper. I expect it is to the Thorntons'."

"It's none of our business," said his mother. "It will give you enough to do to mind your own business without bothering your head with anybody else's."

"I was only thinking that, after all, I might have had a couple of slices of the tongue last night," said Ned.

"Greedy gut!" exclaimed his mother.

"What did you mean by keeping him talking at the foot of the garden, when him and me had business to arrange?" Mr. Alexander asked of his daughter.

"Business—business of a Sunday?" said she. "I think he had enough of business at dinner: you talked of nothing but politics—the squalid politics of

Home Rule—and not an original word from beginning to end—all the old worn phrases that he must be as sick of hearing as I am."

She spoke, turning half-way round while going to the open glass door of the dining-room, and when she had spoken she went on and into the house, before her father had sufficiently recovered from the shock her words gave him to be able to exclaim, as he did simultaneously with the banging of the door:

"The hussy!—the impident hussy! I'll not be telling her when she comes out. I'll lairn her to put on that face again. You seen her, Susan?"

"Ay, I seen her. What call had he to go away before supper?" said his wife.

"What are you talking about anyway?" asked Mr. Alexander, after a pause, with a puzzled expression on his face. "It was me that was talking about the girl and her impidence."

"So was I," said his wife. "But he might ha' stayed for a bite of supper. It's near the full of the moon the night, and the garden looks lovely by moonlight."

The wicker chair on which her husband was sitting gave a creak that sounded like a shriek under the force of his amazed wriggle. He gazed at her and his jaw fell vacantly.

"I'm beat," he said, after a gasp. "I'm beat!"

He pronounced the word "bate."

CHAPTER X

MRS. ALEXANDER had been quite right: the moon was approaching the full, and the garden at Ardreagh looked lovely on this warm night of rose-scented moonlight, though it had few romantic features. The terrace on which James Alexander was sitting was sufficiently high to allow of his having a fine view of the landscape that was bathed in moonlight, on to where the distant lake was gleaming like a flowing river on the horizon. The low hills, cultivated almost to the highest ridges, were darkly purple, except on those unequal patches where the corn had advanced sufficiently to reflect the light; and the valley of Rathtullagh was mysteriously misty, though now and again there came the gleam of the little stream that ran through its depths, making lazy efforts to achieve a waterfall at places. The spinning mills of Arderry and Breeney were a mile away, and hidden by the trees in the Drenta demesne. But Mr. Alexander gazed out to where they lay. The only drawback to the perfect beauty of the night was the impossibility of catching a glimpse of a mill—his own Breeney Mill for choice. But he reflected that, however eligible the site of a house may be, it is impossible for it to include every feature that one looks for, even the appearance of a mill with two chimneys, each seventy feet high. It was a pity; but he had imagination, and on the

magic wings of fancy he soared above the full-foliaged trees of Lord Drenta's demesne and alighted on the roof of his mill. He gazed with thoughtful eyes upon the nearer chimney shaft—the one that had been in his mind—with Home Rule intervals—during the previous week, and he murmured:

"I wonder if them chaps will have the boiler done by Tuesday."

It is found convenient by the millowners in that part of Ulster to have any necessary repairs to their machinery done during the July holidays. The Twelfth and the day following—a sort of Boxing Day to the chief festival—are idle days at the mills, and that gives the engineers their opportunity. Sometimes, however, the accumulated needs of the overworked machinery can barely be met during the space at their command; and Mr. Alexander, knowing the requirements of one of his boilers, had been uneasy, in spite of the exhilaration of the Demonstration, lest everything might not be completed in time to start work on Tuesday. The quiet beauty of the night and the perfume of the roses had made audible the sum of his communings with the spirit of the scene, and he murmured:

"I wonder if them chaps will have the boiler done by Tuesday."

It was eleven o'clock. Every member of his household was in bed. One by one the lights had been extinguished from window to window, until all was in darkness except where the hall lamp illuminated the porch. He heard the sound of his daughter drawing up her blind after putting out her lights—the pushing home of the bolts in the back door by the cook—after

that, silence. His musings had been undisturbed by any sound for more than half an hour, for the faint barking of a dog at Sullivan's farm at the foot of the hills was scarcely noticed by him any more than the throaty incoherent singing by fits and starts of a man on the lake road, a long distance off—a man who had economised the joys of the celebration of the Twelfth, so that they had lasted up to the time of the closing of the third public-house on his way home.

The alternate shaky bass and ambitious, if fatuous, falsetto notes dwindled away, and then the warm summer night closed upon him like a tomb. . . .

When he opened his eyes after a doze of several minutes' duration, it was to see a man standing before him—he had been half conscious of such a presence even before awaking, as one is vaguely conscious in a dream of something that has caused it; but he lay there staring up from his seat at the face of the man, with the moonlight upon it. A hand gripped tightly each arm of his chair, and while his eyes stared, his jaw fell. The man remained immovable, looking down at him for some minutes, and gave a queer laugh.

"Bully James! I guess you hardly know what you're up against," said the stranger. "If I was to go now, you'd tell them in the morning about having seen a ghost. Heth, you're a boy!"

The man spoke as broad Ulster as did James Alexander himself, only his utterance was scarcely so staccato. It was the Ulster of a man who has lived out of Ulster for a long time; the basis of the provincial speech was there, but its angles had, so to speak, been rubbed off.

But even the familiar sound of his native province failed to reassure the man in the chair, and more than a minute had passed before he drew a long breath, and then said in a gasping voice:

"Dick—Dick! Well, I'm dawmed!"

"Ay, y'are that, James, my man—nobody knows that better nor yourself: y'are dawmed, sure and certain, and you took me for the ghost of myself come to tell ye; but you don't need any telling, James, my wee man, for you've known it well all these years—ever since you cheated me out of my property, and then bid me away till hell. Ay, it's no wonder that ye look to see if any of the windies in your house is a bit open; ye wouldn't liko anybody up there to hear our wee chat thegether, James, my man. Ye think that they'd be scarred out of a year's growth, so ye do."

And then James Alexander seemed to become himself again. His features, that had been distorted through surprise, became normal; he brought his teeth together with a snap; and although his face was in the shadow, the man before him could see that he was smiling in a sharp, self-satisfied way...

"You're a liar," were the first words that he spoke on recovering himself. "And now that you're here, you be to tell me how you come here after thirty years and more. Maybe it's your intention to pay your creditors in full all that you owe them—eh, Dick?"

"If that was my intention, wouldn't I pull a revolver from my pocket and plug you with lead, James, and then set fire to that house fornenst me, James Alexander? Answer me that. Would that settle to the

full all that I owe you, James? By the living Jingo, I've been wondering all these years what it was held back my hand that day when I come to you, saying, 'I'm much obliged to you, James, for the good turn you've done me, and I'll take over my own from you'; and you turns to me and says coolly, says you, 'Man alive, what are ye talking about anyway? Whose owe the mill but me?' 'Come along, man,' says I, 'I've no time for making fun. I hear there's a good order from Lindsays and I'll see till it'—I mind well that yon order was from Lindsays—and says you, 'Who's making fun? If you think to bounce me, Dick, you'll dawm soon find out your mistake,' says you. And for all that I never made an attempt to hoak your eyes out of your head, but just dandhered away down the road as if nothing had happened! By the hokey, I've never been able to find out how it was I didn't hit ye a skite that would ha' done for ye for evermore."

"If you haven't found out for all your thinking, I can tell you now why you didn't hit me that skite, Dick, my man. It was because you were never a fool. That's the full explanation of the puzzle. You weren't fool enough to put out your hands for the nearest policeman to slip them iron bracelets ontill your wrists, Dick, my man."

The visitor took a step back and gazed at him without speaking a word for some time. At last he shook his head, saying:

"You bate all that I ever heerd tell of, James Alexander. It's you that has the nerve of the devil, so ye have. I come here without a word of warning, like a dead man coming to life again, or most like the

ghost of the brother that ye hoped was safe tucked away in the grave long ago—a deal can happen inside thirty years, James—and I stan' up fornenst ye and you just awake from a doze, and yet ye're no more put out nor if I had just stepped round to Billy Spence's for a half-'un! And ye begin to talk as if it was me that was the cheat in place of you! By Gob, it's you that has the nerve! You're a man, James, whatever people may say of you. I suppose there's no man that hasn't got a bit of the devil about him—a man without that bit of the devil would be as poor as a farl of soda bread without the soda; but in the making of you, James, there was an extry spoonful of the devil, I'm thinking. You bate all. I've been round the world a bit, but I never met a man fit to carry drinks to you. I give in till you. I'm bate."

"Now ye're talkin' sense, brother Dick, and not the blathers that ye begun with. That's a fine night, Dick, and maybe ye wouldn't mind taking a turn with me down the garden. Man, but there's a quare nice smell that comes from them roses below there."

"I can feel the smell of them from here," said Dick, as his brother rose from his chair and pointed across the lawn. "I can feel the smell and it's nice enough, and what ye're thinking is that the clatther of voices out here at this hour of the night may reach the ears of some o' them 'uns inside the house, and that would never do, would it? But come along, man dear, I'm ready to play into your hands now as I did once before unbeknownst to anyone except yourself. Yon's a brave wee house ye've built for yourself, James, and man, but this is a brave bit o' garden! We'll talk low,

to we get down it a step or two. It's quare and dark through yon tunnel"—they had reached the end of the pergola, and he pointed down it—"the quare an' handy place for a chap that owed another a grudge to pay it back—eh, James?"

"Sit ye down here, Dick, and tell us all that has happened till ye," said Mr. Alexander, seating himself where his daughter had sat while offering her confidences to Willie Kinghan, and motioning his brother to the place beside him. He ignored the suggestion respecting the suitability of the dark depths of the rose bowers for the enactment of a tragic scene. He did not consider it worth considering even as a jest. "Sit ye down, man; it doesn't seem more nor a year or two since we were thegether. And where have ye been at all, and first of all, have ye made any money to make up for what ye lost all through your own carelessness?"

"My own carelessness? Do ye mean that it was too careless of me to hand over the wee mill till you, without getting an agreement made out betwixt us in black and white?" said Dick aggressively, and with one hand fumbling for something in his hip pocket. James watched him, but without a tremor, though he had never before known a man keep his pipe in that place. But it was the pipe that came forth, and after it the tobacco pouch. "Carelessness? Will ye tell me what good an agreement in writing would be to me, considering what the transaction was betwixt us? It would only have put me faster within your grip, and you know that yourself. Have ye a match about ye, James?"

James found a match-box and handed it to him.

"That's true," he said. "So you had a suspicion of me at the start, Dick?"

"Ay; I knew something of ye, James; but I knew that I be to thrust you, and I took the risk," said Dick.

"That put the transaction on a business basis, didn't it?" said James; "and that's how I looked at it from the first. It was me that run just as much risk as yourself, for it could easy have been made out that I was joining in a fraud with you to cheat your creditors. But I took the risk: I felt that it was me that was underwriting you, and that's why I took the profits—there's nothing like looking at a thing like thon from a business point of view. Sentiment may be sentiment or sham, but business is business. I hope you've done as well as me between times, Dick."

"You needn't be afeard; I'm not going to try and borrow anything from you, James," said Dick. "If I wanted to do that it isn't you I would come till, without I could offer you good security."

"To be sure. But you've done well for yourself? I might ha' knowed that you would. You always had a head on your shoulders. And where might you have been all this time?"

"I've been in more places nor one; but for the best part in Australia. They told me there was no money to be made in Australia: it's too full of Ulstermen, said they, and you can't get the better of them. That was the way they talked."

"Ay, they were Nationalists, I'll swear; that's how they slander us, because we refuse to submit to them. The Papishes can't make money out of us, I allow, but a true Ulsterman with gumption can do very well for

himself with his fellow-countrymen, if he goes the right way about it. And you went the right way about it, Dick: you had lairned your lesson?"

"I had; it was you lairned me."

"I'm glad you're grateful. I was younger nor you, but I saw what your weakness was: you were too ready to thrust everybody. That's not business. I knew well that you'd never get on without you lairned the first lesson that everyone in business must lairn. Don't thrust your own brother till he has put his name to the paper, and then get it stamped at the neardest office. It gives a quare feelin' of confidence in him when you get the dockyment stamped."

"Ay, it was you lairned me that, and I'm grateful to you, James. My experience of you stood by me. You'll never get the better of me again, Jamie, man."

"I know better nor to try, my boyo. And so you're doin' well. You'll tell me all about it to-morrow, won't you?—it's too late the-night. Of course, there's no foolish notion in your nut of paying up to your creditors. I never knew any good come o' that. Bankruptcy is an or'nary business risk: it upsets the proper balance of that risk when a man that has gone through the Coort insists on paying twenty shillings in the pound with maybe twenty years' interest."

"It isn't often that happens in Ulster, James. I disremember any instance of it but one, and that was some people at Lisburn, and I mind that they never did well afterwards. The creditors pocketed the money and thought them fellas paid up to inspire confidence, so that they might have a chance of making a proper burst later on. Oh, make your mind easy,

James. It never crossed my mind to open up that old sheugh."

"You're right. People about here would only ask what you were up till. Such conscientiousness only breeds suspicion. And are ye a married man, Richard?"

"Ay, I'm married and done for."

"She had a bit o' the needful, I'm hoping?"

"Oh, a bit; 'twas a help at the time, I don't deny."

"You done bravely. Any family?"

"A boy, that's all. How's yours doing?"

"Bravely. Why the hell didn't ye drop a line to say you were coming? It seems an unbrotherly thing to do, to let you go away like this. But the spare room has no bed in it just now. Are ye stopping at the Verner Arms?"

"Ay. You see, I run down from Belfast the day and meant to pay ye a surprise visit."

"And so ye did, surely."

"Ay, but it wasn't as I meant it."

"Oh, hould your whisht, man dear. Never let on that you were play actin'. You'll be comin' to us the-morrow whatever happens."

"Well, we'll see. I have to go back to Belfast sometime."

"I'll get the room made ready for ye anyway, Dick. Man, but it's like the old times to see you back. Hell ter my sowl, but you're a better man nor ever ye was. Come inside and have a half-'un, and I'll go for a dandher down the road with ye."

"I don't mind if I do," said Dick, as his brother led the way through the porch and into the dining-room. He made no comment upon the fine proportions of the

room. He simply drank off the whisky that James poured out for him.

"Have ye a match about you?" enquired the long-lost brother as they went down the avenue and reached the road that ran through the heart of Ulster.

CHAPTER XI

JAMES ALEXANDER did not go very far on the way to the Verner Arms at Moneybeg, with his brother, but by the time he got back to Ardreagh it was long past midnight. Even when he had returned to the house he did not go to bed at once. He had a good deal to think about, and he knew that it is preferable to do one's thinking while walking about in the open air rather than while tossing about in bed. He had never "let on," as he would have phrased it, to his brother that he had been affected by this surprise visit: it is not the habit of Ulster business men to "let on" anything they can conceal, even in the case of their own brethren. They regard "letting on" as a weakness which people outside may take advantage of upon occasions; and so they have got the name of being "close"; and they are. But only very few men in the world have ever succeeded in being "close" to themselves. One can with difficulty pretend to oneself to be quite unmoved over an incident when all the time the little beads of perspiration are upon one's forehead.

His brother had appeared before him just as he had said—like a dead man come to life again, or like the ghost of a dead man revisiting thus the glimpses of the moon; and though James had apparently recovered quickly from the effects of the shock and

borne himself bravely in the presence of his brother, yet when the latter had disappeared and he found himself once more on the brick terrace of his home, he stood there feeling as if he had suddenly awakened from a disquieting dream—a dream with a ghost in it and a horrid nightmare moment that gave him the impression of being throttled by a dead thing.

For a long time past he had thought of Dick as dead. Thirty years and more had gone by since he had parted from his brother, and he had heard nothing of him since then; so that while for ten years or so he had thought of him—any time that he did think of him—as alive, for a second ten he had wondered if he could possibly be alive, and had come to the conclusion during the latter half of the period that he must be dead. During the third decade he had never entertained the possibility of his being alive. And yet an hour ago, while quietly dozing in his wicker chair, he had opened his eyes suddenly and seen Dick standing with the moonlight on his face.

At first he had not been very clear about the identity of his visitant, but when Dick spoke he recognised his voice; though some minutes had passed before he could think of it except as a voice from the grave. Even now as he returned to his seat he had not fully realised the actuality of the incident: he had still the impression of having passed through the phantom happenings of a dream.

He went into the house and turned into the dining-room. He knew what he wanted; but as he half filled a tumbler with whisky he was surprised to find that he was letting the neck of the decanter clink against the rim of the glass. That sound did more to pull him

together than the stimulant. He was mightily ashamed of himself for being so perturbed. What had he to be nervous about? Had he not got the better of his brother in their interview, just as he had got the better of him thirty odd years ago? He knew that Dick had come back to "have it out" with him on account of the transaction which had brought about their separation; but he didn't go very far in the way of carrying out his intention, for by the exercise of a little tact in treating with him, the man who had come to overwhelm him with reproaches had not gone further than to call him a thief, and even that trivial charge he, James, had been able to rebut, and they had separated on the friendliest of terms.

And yet he had found his hand trembling so that he made the tumbler clink with every ripple of the liquor through the throttle of the decanter!

It was no wonder that he felt ashamed of himself.

He gulped down the whisky, and then seated himself slowly in his big chair.

"Poor ould Dick! Poor ould Dick!" he muttered. "He might ha' knowed better nor to try to get the better o' me for all his play actin'. A ghost, if you please! Poor Dick! What did he look for? Did he think that I was the man to fall in a heap at his feet and cry for mercy? And he had every chance. There I was—I suppose I had gone asleep, and when I opened my eyes, there he was, after thirty years! A bit of a shock! Oh, ay; but I soon lairned him that he was mistook in me—he confessed it. 'Man, but y'have the nerve!' he said, and there was respect in his voice. So there was; he knew me for the best man still. Oh, poor Dick! He never was more poor

Dick nor when I seen him just now. Lord! to think of it! After thirty years—let me see—thirty-two years! Lord, to think of it all!"

And he remained in his chair for another hour thinking of it all.

He thought of how his brother Richard had come to him in his little cottage one night—the cottage of the foreman of the factory—and had told him the story of his coming bankruptcy—it was inevitable, but it could be staved off for another year, and that would be long enough to make the plan he had conformable with the law; for the plan was that he, Richard, should hand over the little spinning factory which he had started four years before, on a ridiculously inadequate basis of capital, to his brother James for a fictitious consideration, and that James should hold it for him and maintain it as a going concern until the bankruptcy proceedings should be over, when he himself, whitewashed financially, would resume possession and pay James a hundred pounds for his accommodation.

That was the little scheme which Richard had devised for getting the tiny mill into such a position as would lead to its development as a paying and profitable concern; and it appeared to James to be a most promising little plan. To be sure it involved the cheating of a score of creditors; but as Dick had pointed out, he had taken the greatest care to deal with people in the highest walks of the trade—big houses, to whom the loss of a few hundreds would mean nothing; and these people would be wise enough to refrain from throwing good money after bad in their endeavour to get behind the affidavits which would

have to be sworn on the most generous scale before the bankruptcy proceedings should be pronounced satisfactory to the bankrupt. It was only the small creditors that were worrying to a bankrupt, Dick explained —he had evidently gone very thoroughly into the subject, considering it from the first in all its bearings —the big houses would not court the irritation incidental to repeated adjournments before the Registrar. They had plenty of experience of doctors' certificates —it would seem as if only the most sensitive people became bankrupt, so great an effect upon their health had the prospect of coming before the Registrar for examination. Oh, Dick had worked out his whole scheme to four places of decimals, so to speak, the ciphers after the decimal point being the largest creditors, and the small ones being rendered still more insignificant through the position of the ciphers in front of them—oh, Dick had the whole thing on his fingers' ends! He had omitted no detail—with one exception, and as it turned out, that was the most important of all. He had assumed that his brother would be honest in joining with him in carrying out his plan of dishonesty. James gave the scheme that sullen acquiescence which he knew would not arouse the suspicion in his brother's mind that would be the result of any show of eagerness on his part; and the result proved that Dick's calculations had not been wrong: he was made bankrupt in due course, and when the creditors tried to take possession of the little factory they found that the door was bolted against them with affidavits affirming that it was the property, not of the bankrupt, but of his younger brother.

Of course there was some little fuss made: people

will talk, even in the face of documents of such undoubted probity as affidavits; and there were some who said that the brothers were a pair of robbers, but they said so in whispers, and neither of the pair minded—they would not have minded if the statement had been shouted out by anyone standing on the cupola of the mill chimney, like a muezzin with his "Allah illa Allah" on his mosque tower. The only thing they would have minded was the snarl of a creditor who had been bitten and was ready to bite in return. But the snarls came, as usual, from the curs (so called by Dick, though, to do him justice, he bore them no malice), and he had been right about the big men: they took a large-minded view of the incident, shrugging their shoulders and writing off the account among their bad debts. Never was there a more satisfactory bankruptcy—for the bankrupt. So Richard Alexander thought until, after a couple of quiescent months, he went to his brother and said:

"We managed yon business fine, James, and I'm thinkin' that I be to start again on Monday; but you can stay on as manager."

"What might your meaning be, Richard, my man?" James had enquired with an expressionless face.

"What might *your* meaning be, James, my man?" Dick had said. "Amn't I telling ye that it's about time I took over my wee mill again?"

"Man dear, what are ye talkin' about anyway?" James had enquired. "*Your* wee mill? Whereabouts is your wee mill, Richard?"

"Quit that nonsense; this is no time for foolin'!"

"Truer words never was spoke, Dick. The time for foolin' is over. There was a quare lot o' foolin' betwixt

you and your creditors, my dear man; I'm not for sayin' that ye didn't fool them bravely; what I am for sayin' is that ye'll not fool me so easy. This wee mill is mine, Dick—mine, if there's any truth in two affidavits swore in Tom Rolston's office in proper form and accepted by the Coort—this mill is mine, I'm tellin' ye this day; but if ye have a mind ye can come in as manager. Now don't stand there gurnin' at me, for I've my work to mind."

James Alexander, sitting in his arm-chair with his hand still grasping the tumbler out of which he had drunk his whisky, recalled visibly that scene of thirty-two years ago—he recollected every word that had been exchanged between him and his brother, down to the curse which the latter had uttered before walking away.

"Ye've done me rightly, James Alexander," he had said. "I don't deny that ye have me in a hole; but if ye think that any good is goin' to come to ye through yon bit of trickery, ye'll find out your mistake. If it ben't a curse till you and yours, there's no God in heaven!"

That was a very shocking thing for Dick to say; but James did not blame him greatly. James really sympathised with him: he could not deny that the trick for cheating the creditors had been well thought out, and that it deserved to work more successfully than it had for the master mind that had conceived it. He had often wondered that Dick had not hit him such a skite as he would have reluctantly remembered to the day of his death—Dick had just confessed that he had for many years been perplexed when trying to find out how it was that particular skite had not been

administered; for the farewell curse, though undoubtedly severe, was but a sorry substitute for the skite. The latter would have left its mark upon him, but the former had not caused him an uneasy moment. He had had no belief in the efficacy of a curse as a clog to the prosperity of a spinning mill. He had heard of the fortunes of old families being affected by a curse that had been "laid" upon them, sometimes in a sorry jingle of a rhyming couplet—that sort of thing was all very well in its way; but he had never heard of a pushing young fellow failing as a butcher, or a baker, or a spinner, because of a curse being "laid" upon the business. Rhythmical curses to be effective should only be directed against a county family; they were worth nothing when met by push, hard-headedness and a determination to get on no matter at whose expense. These were the virtues that rose superior to jingling malediction, and James Alexander knew that he had the whole bunch in his own hands. He was determined to get on, and he had got on. He had worked the wee mill until it had become a big mill, and he had become a big man in his own neighbourhood. He had had many a check, of course, but he knew that in the hunt for money many checks must be expected; they mean progress, and the evasive thing is run to earth at last. He had got on, and he admired himself for getting on; and here he was thinking of that happy incident which had laid the foundation of his fortune.

He had got on, and his brother had got on as well. He did not grudge him his prosperity; on the contrary, he was greatly pleased to hear of it; for it saved him the performance of an unpleasant duty—the refusal to respond to an almost certain appeal for money.

Yes, he could be broad-minded and large-hearted: Heaven forbid that he should grudge Dick his fortune.

Before he had swallowed his second tumbler of whisky-and-water, he had come to perceive that it was he who had laid the foundation of Dick's fortune by taking the wee mill out of his hands and sending him across the seas where fortunes were to be made by all men who had the spirit of the Ulsterman, which is essentially a business spirit; and that Dick should be proportionately obliged to him. He had said as much to Dick when they had been together on the garden seat; but he had not then been at all so impressed with the accuracy of the assertion as he was now, when he had a chance of thinking over the matter properly. Yes, he saw clearly now that he was the author of his brother's prosperity, for had not Dick acknowledged that he learned from him not to trust even his own brother?

He found it to be a very gratifying reflection. He had already drunk two pretty stiff tumblers of whisky-and-water, but he had done so because he believed that he needed a stimulant; now he poured himself out another glass and drank it in a spirit of good fellowship with himself. He was very well satisfied with himself. He had an impression that he was drinking to his own very good health—a good comrade, a good patriot, a good brother! His reflections were the outspoken peroration of an effective speech in his own honour. The chairman had resumed his seat amid the clinking of glasses and the stamping of enthusiastic feet; and he could hear the fine chorus:

For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
And so say all of us.

He thought it best to put out a hand to the table when rising to respond—he somehow did not find it so easy as it looked to get upon his feet; but when at last he succeeded, he found himself unable to locate the chairman, owing to the swimming and swirling of the walls, and indeed the furniture of the room around him; for that figure in pink standing there—there in the opening of the door—that could not possibly be the chairman. But if not, who the mischief was it?

"James Alexander, you should be ashamed of yourself," came the voice of the apparition. "Half-past one o'clock on a Sunday night and everybody in the house in bed and asleep hours ago! Look at yon decanter! It was nearabouts full after supper, and now there's barely a glass in it! Heth, you're a boy! This is what you meant by taking a breath of fresh air in your chair outside! James Alexander, you should be ashamed of yourself! Take off your shoes and come up till your bed. There's no call for you to awake anybody if you mind your feet and houl' a grip of the bawnisters. You've had a whole bottle of whisky this day forbye all that you drank at dinner and after."

"Susan," said James Alexander, becoming very dignified, by the aid of the table. "Susan, I've good reason for everything—down to the very last drop. Who d'ye think was here — here — in this room, and outside — who? — why, my brother — my dear ould brother Dick!—yes, Susan, Richard Alexander and no other—returned after thirty-two years, hale and hearty, and going away satisfied that whatever I did was for the best. He said's much. 'You've lairned me, James,' said he: and that

was how he got on—he said's much, and he bears no malice now—none whatever, Susan."

"Oh, the man's farder gone nor I thought," said Susan, taking him by the arm. "Quit your talkin', James dear, and come till your bed. Sit ye down and I'll pull off them shoes of yours."

"What for shouldn't I pull them off for myself?" he asked, with a hand clutching the back of a chair. "You fancy I'm drunk——"

"Ay, the quare fancy!"

"I'm not drunk, I'm telling ye. Woman dear, don't you know by now the differs betwixt a man that's a drop o' drink on him and one that's seen his long-lost brother?"

"Sit ye down and I'll draw them off easy for you. There's a good man. Don't shame yourself by rousing the whole house."

He took a deal of persuading, but at last she coaxed him to acquiesce in her suggestion. He sat down, and she knelt in her pink dressing-gown at his feet and removed his shoes. When she awoke him after the operation she found him more amenable to the discipline of retiring. He was got upstairs with only a small amount of labour, over creaking boards and by straining banisters, and by the time he had his head on his pillow he was weeping quite happily, while he babbled about having made his brother's fortune.

His good wife did not trouble herself trying to assuage his maudlin emotion. She had had ample experience of him. Only she did not know why on earth he should go on rhyming about his brother. She came to the conclusion that he had been too long in the moonlight. She believed in the Ulster tradition of

moon-drawing. People who were moon-drawn were in a more perilous way than those who were sun-struck, she had heard; and at his time of life James Alexander should be careful.

She did not feel any uneasiness respecting his dealing with the whisky: that was nothing worth thinking about. People are not afraid of such incidents in Ulster.

CHAPTER XII

EDWARD ALEXANDER had suggested with a sly humour that had a sting in it for his sister's ears, that Willie Kinghan was "slithering" off to the Thorntons'. It was the rankling of the sting that had provoked Helen into an outburst of impatience against her father and his absorbing the attention of their guest at dinner and afterward. She thought it very probable that Mr. Kinghan had gone to the Thorntons', and with that thought came the knowledge that Mr. Kinghan would find the Thorntons' house to be a contrast to the one which he had just left.

Her judgment was not astray. When Willie Kinghan came upon Colonel Thornton sitting out with his daughter on the old stone terrace of their house, surrounded by—by—oh, there was only one word for it—they were surrounded by quiet—an ineffable quiet—the quiet of the first Sabbath upon earth which caused the Maker to think that it was all very good—when Willie came upon them, he felt the force of the contrast which Helen's shrewd judgment had assured her he would feel.

He stood for a minute among the silent trees of the grounds, watching the two figures in the distance. The man was smoking a cigar and his daughter had a book on her knee, but it was not open. They were giving themselves up unreservedly to the delight of

the quietude; and the man who was watching them was wondering why people (he did not exclude himself from their number) should ever hope to find a joy in the strenuous business of life when it was so plain to all that happiness had its home in the centre of such a scene as this. In a few minutes all his ambitions seemed to him to be squalid—vulgar—noisy! The cult of the steam whistle, the motor hoot, the raucous voice, the perspiring fist thumping a table—thumping anything that would resound and convey to gaping fools the idea of force behind the fist—seemed to him to be—what was it like?—it flashed upon him in a moment—it was like the wild clanging and clashing of the music of the Baal worshippers in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, contrasted with the invocation of the prophet that follows it, dignified in its simplicity, convincing in its sincerity, exalted in its aloofness from all that tends to debase in life.

There before him was surely all that should be the aim of a man to accomplish—to get within hearing of the still small voices.

He looked and sighed, and walked on toward the house. He knew that he was not strong enough to fling aside all his hopes of achievement—all his longing for the arena and its struggle—although he felt that there might be something in his nature that would respond to the finer influences of life if he would but yield to them. He was not strong enough to turn his back upon the goal to which he had been looking for years, and seek a worthier—a less ignoble.

He had given that involuntary sigh as he walked on. But before he had gone more than a dozen steps he stopped again.

"She can do it—she can do it—she alone!" he said, though not audibly even to himself. "If she should tell me, I would hear."

Then he walked quickly on through the formal garden with its stone-edged parterres, its old fountain, and its pillars up which the roses climbed, drooping heavy with bloom when the ascent was accomplished. A dozen stone steps led to the terrace, and before he stood between the piers on the top, each crowned with its carved vase, overflowing with a crimson flower, she saw him and rose to meet him.

It seemed to him that she was the only figure in the world that would harmonise with these surroundings —with the world of flowers in which she was set. She had all the grace of a flower—she moved among them as a sister—her motion was that of something that the wind moves.

So he thought, and he was the most prosaic of men.

Minna Thornton was called a tall girl by girls who were short. She was not remarkably tall. She was called fair by girls who were dark, but she was not noticeably fair. Her hair might have been the symbol of autumn—russet, with a glint of autumn's gold among its silky texture, and her eyes, "the bluest of things gray, the grayest of things blue," were like the eyes of a child, large and full of the wonder of what was coming—trustful in innocence—a gracious girl—a girl who made prosaic people recall verses with which their memory had been stored early in life, but for which they had found no use until they met her.

As she approached Willie Kinghan, the gossamer threads of many verses floated through his memory, entangling themselves, but harmoniously, like the

songs of different birds heard in the woodland in early spring, making a musical medley of indefinite sweetness. Somehow she seemed new to him every time he saw her. Her approach disclosed something of her that he had never seen before—some exquisite movement of an arm—some thoughtful poise of her head. To-day it was her hand that rested on the edge of one of the stone vases when she had greeted him, and they stood talking for a minute before going to her father who was approaching slowly. Her hand lay on the rim of the vase like the pink-white petal of a flower—not exactly a rose, some other flower, rarer, more waxen, but with life in it, a flower not discarded by summer, a growing flower.

And to think that he had held it in his own the moment before!

"Lovely," he said, touching upon the charm of the evening. "There is nothing in the world so lovely as the walk through your beeches from the Rathbeg road on a July evening. The sun is just in the right place, not too far down. Oh, Minna, I have seen nothing like it—and you at the end of it all!"

"You were good to come; father has been longing for a chat with you," she said; "so have I. You come to us here from your metropolitan life just as a townsman must have come to the old homestead a hundred and fifty years ago—telling of all the strange things that go with the strenuous life. You do us good, Willie."

And now they were met by her father, who, owing to a wound received in Egypt thirty years before, walked with a slight limp.

"I am glad you were able to come," he said. "We

have not seen you since Christmas. We might all have come under the rule of the Germans, or the Irish, or some other foreign Power within that space of time, and you amusing yourself at the Castle garden parties and mothers' meetings, and such like festivities of the Aberdeen régime. Lord! What the Castle Season was in the days of the Abercorns or the Londonderrys!"

"My dear father, it is only natural that the Castle régime should become dilapidated now that it is drawing so near to its close," said the girl.

"I see: it's like a house that is so far gone as to be beyond repair," said her father.

"The Aberdeens have done something for Irish industry, at any rate," laughed Willie. "They have galvanised crochet-work into popularity by calling it lace."

"I don't hear that they've done much for the far finer linen embroideries of the North," said Colonel Thornton. "In my young days, forty years ago, that was a genuine cottage industry in almost every part of Ulster. One could count thirty or forty girls clustered round their doorsteps on an evening like this, plying their needles and scissors on the fabric that they had strained between two small hoops—'cut work,' it was called. It lasted for years and was a beautiful thing."

"Those were the days when there were proper laundries," said Minna. "Nothing can defy the ravages of hygiene when it takes the form of a laundry."

"I wonder if we are talking on the Irish question," said Willie. "If so, please let us go no further. I have had enough of it during yesterday and to-day to carry me on for a while."

"Irish question? There's no Irish question in Ulster—it has been answered by Ulster long ago," cried the Colonel, giving his stick a rap upon one of the flags of the terrace. "But if we don't talk about our future in Ulster, where shall we find a topic?"

"This is Sunday evening, and the first fine one we have had since May," remarked Minna reprovingly.

"Ask Mr. Gifford if religious people shouldn't discuss their future every Sunday, fine or wet?" cried her father. "Minna, my girl, don't try to deprive us of our religion. Is a child of mine going over to the enemy?"

"My dear Willie, you are the stormy petrel of the hour: a tempest invariably follows your appearance. I give you my word that nothing of Home Rule was mentioned by my father to-day," said Minna. "And before you have time to take a seat he has begun to talk of it. Do sit down, and tell us why you did not sail a yacht at the Kingstown regatta this year."

Willie laughed again as he took his place on one of the leathern cushions of the old stone seat.

"That is changing the subject indeed," he cried. "I don't think that by any stretch of the imagination could the slightest thread of connection be perceived between Home Rule and the Kingstown regatta. What do you say, Colonel?"

"H'm, what about the contending races—surely the Home Rule question is one of contending races? But I won't press that point. Give an account of your neglect in the matter of yachts."

"I can clear myself, I hope," replied Willie. "The fact is that George Greer, whose boat I used to steer when he could get no one better, has sold her to Eddy

Seymour, and I wasn't called on by anybody else to take a tiller this year."

"I noticed that the *Raven* was not racing either at Dublin or Bangor this year," said the Colonel. "Why on earth did Greer sell such a good boat—three firsts and a second last year she won, I think?"

"He sold her for the same reason that most people in this country are getting rid of all their saleable property and a good deal that's not saleable. The menace of Home Rule is too much for them."

"There now, we are into it again through my most innocent question," cried Minna. "Well, I have done my best for you, Willie. I wash my hands of all responsibility in the matter of conversation. Go on with your Home Rule, if you please, but don't blame me, I entreat of you."

"You made a noble effort to achieve the impossible, and it must be accounted to you for righteousness," said Willie. "But in regard to the yacht, even if Greer had held on to her and I had sailed her in a race or two, I'm not quite sure that that would be accounted to me for righteousness by my prospective constituency. I'm supposed to be next candidate for a vacancy in some Division—our own for choice—and it might be thought that I should be better employed, considering the crisis we are approaching full steam ahead and with a dozen heavy Redmondites clustering together to hold down the lever of the safety valve."

"I was glad to hear that you were in the field," said Colonel Thornton. "The truth is that if we had had better men to represent Ulster, things would never have been allowed to go on as they have done for the past three or four years. We must all admit that the

tactics have always been on the side of the Nationalists."

"'Tactricks,' old MacDonald, our gardener, calls them," said Minna.

"They need a word to be invented all for themselves," said her father. "But tics or tricks, they have been too many for us."

"Not yet; they haven't done with us quite yet," said Willie. "The fight is not over yet: it may not even have begun."

"I am beginning to lose confidence in England," said Colonel Thornton. "Think of the record of the Nationalists. Think of the years of outrages—murders, maimings of cattle—barbarities on a level with those we have been reading of in the Balkans—all were committed by Nationalists, though the leaders were able to sneak out of their responsibility. They were 'cleared'—you remember Kipling's poem?" He quoted the last stanza of "Cleared."

"Truer lines were never written!" cried Willie. "Home Rule is to be the reward of outrage and barbarity; and the Nationalists have handed on the torch—literally the torch—to the Suffragettes. 'We have shown you the way to get all that you want from England,' they have said, 'and it is your fault if you fall short of us.' If the Nationalists can show themselves to be right, the Suffragettes cannot be wrong."

"That goes without saying," said the Colonel. "That is what makes me feel ashamed of England to submit for so long to be governed by the rabble who, a few years ago, roared with delight at every announcement of the disasters to our army in South Africa—they did that under the eyes of nearly all the Members

of the present Government. I thought you spoke very reasonably at the Demonstration yesterday. It is perfectly true that, without their red herrings to draw the attention of the electors from their nefarious schemes, they would have no chance of getting a majority even in the most Radical constituencies. The policy of the Gladstonian Governments was the policy of the jumping cat: they waited to see what way the cat was going to jump before they made a move; but the present Government have kept in power by their adroitness in trailing the red herring."

CHAPTER XIII

"AND now that we are agreed on all points, suppose we give the subject a rest," said Minna.

"Any rest that we might give the subject would be a purely artificial one, my dear," replied her father. "There is only one topic in loyal Ulster to-day; it is in the air: we breathe it, and it has become part of our life—our life depends upon the issue and so does the life of all that remains of good in Ireland. We can no more refrain from discussing Home Rule than people who are living on the side of an active volcano can refrain from making an occasional remark upon the rumblings underfoot or the sulphurous fumes overhead. When we were shut up in Ladysmith with the Ulsterman who held the prestige of England in the hollow of his hand, some good people thought the time an opportune one for starting a society for the study of philosophy. At the first meeting a shell threw about a ton of earth over the philosopher, and the meeting dissolved before the first resolution was put. It was decided, after that, that it would be advisable to postpone the discussion on the systems of Descartes and Kant until the Boers had exhausted their bombs. What do people aboard a sinking ship talk about?"

"The cleverness of Mr. Marconi, I suppose," suggested Minna.

"Quite so. They don't as a rule bother themselves

about the pictures at the Royal Academy, or the laboured jocularities of Bernard Shaw."

"And therefore—therefore what?—we must spend the rest of the evening telling Willie what he has already said a score of times on a score of platforms? Oh, my dear father, I refuse to submit. I want to hear if he has succeeded in picking up another Mason jug to make up my set—I want to hear a lot of things."

Her father laughed.

"I should like to be permitted to say a few words about the Papists just now," said he. "You must remember that the Montgomerys are coming to supper, so that we shall not have a chance later."

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we—diet—that is your plea?" laughed the girl. "Oh, very well; ease your mind of its maledictions while you can—and you too, Willie; for I defy anyone to say anything nasty about the Papists in the presence of Mrs. Montgomery."

"Personally, I never felt less inclined to maledict anyone," said Willie, "least of all Mrs. Montgomery. Next to being alone with you and the Colonel, I should enjoy being at the table with the Montgomerys. She is so charming I can scarcely bring myself to believe that she is a Catholic."

"Ulster to the backbone!" cried the girl. "He cannot allow that even the least compromising virtue could belong to a Catholic. How truly Ulster! I hope your prospects as a candidate will not be jeopardised if it should become known that you had actually had supper with a Catholic on the day after the Twelfth."

"I would really rather not have it mentioned in the hearing of some people on my committee," said he.

"Ah, politics makes strange bedfellows," said Colonel Thornton. "I should not like to have it laid on me to explain to some people—our friend Mr. Alexander, for instance—that our great hope at the present crisis is the English Catholic. You could never make anyone here believe that the English Catholics are on our side almost to a man."

"If you were to tell them so, they would say that they were Jesuits—merely pretending to be good Conservatives in order to spy upon us," said Minna.

"I have always thought it wise to say nothing in public about the English Catholics," said Willie. "There is nothing gained by setting people's backs up, and giving them a chance of saying offensive things about an unholy alliance."

"You really would make a most admirable representative of Ulster," said Minna.

And all things considered, it must be confessed that Mr. Kinghan, in spite of the fact of his having been educated in England, and of his having lived in Dublin for several years, could never be taken for anything except an Ulsterman. The characteristics of the true Ulsterman had been inherited by him, and he knew that most of them were of the type that go to the forming of a strong and able people—not, perhaps, a pleasant people to live among—certainly not half so charming a people as the true Irish; but the people who are formed to get on are rarely the most delightful people. The men who look upon success in business as the greatest of all the virtues seldom form the most delightful of communities. They do not aim at

being delightful—in fact, they suspect any others who possess social charm. To achieve anything by the exercise of such arts as tact, sympathy, politeness, or personal charm, they regard as trickery and chicanery; and one who habitually sets himself out to be agreeable is referred to by them as a charlatan.

The Protestant people of Ulster form, perhaps, the strongest and ablest community in the world, and when you tell them that they are not the nicest to live among, they assure you that nobody axed you. They are a people of determination and of vigour and of religion. They worship the Heaven that helps them who help themselves, and there is not an atheist in the land.

Willie Kinghan did not at first appreciate the compliment that was paid to him by Minna—with a smile; but he proved the correctness of her judgment by acknowledging (after a minute or two of reflection) that she could not have paid him a greater compliment.

"I desire nothing better than to become the representative of all that has made Ulster great to-day," said he.

"Or yesterday—yesterday was your Twelfth," said she, smiling playfully as before. "Ulster is greatest on the Twelfth, is it not, Willie?"

"And very properly," cried her father. "I remember when I was a boy thinking that the Twelfth, with its blatant drumming and fifing, was something of a nuisance; but when I got to see how things stood in Ireland, I came to the conclusion that the demonstrations were the outcome of the instinct of a determined people, suspicious of their surroundings—not trusting anyone but themselves to maintain the rights

for which they had fought. The events of the past thirty years have fully justified the celebration of the Twelfth."

"I'm afraid that Minna is lukewarm," said Willie with an affectation of mock seriousness which did not deceive Minna in the least: she knew that in his heart the regret was quite real.

"Perhaps I am lukewarm," said she. "But that is possibly because the music is so bad. It is so like a woman, you will say, I am sure, not to be able to see the greatness of a movement in spite of the feebleness of 'Boyne Water' as a musical composition. But you really must get an Orange Marseillaise, Willie. Why, 'The Wearing of the Green' is magnificent in comparison with 'Boyne Water.'"

"Didn't someone say long ago about the devil having got the copyright of the best music?" said her father.

"Someone did say it, and his own compositions proved that he at least did not draw his inspiration from the Evil One," said Minna.

"Music is nothing," said Willie decisively. "Was there ever greater doggerel than that which inspired our great forefathers, the Scotch Covenanters, in their campaigns?"

"Never," she replied. "That is why I am glad I never had a chance of meeting any of our great forefathers. They were a grand people, I am sure, but horrid—quite horrid."

That was the last word in the controversy—if it was a controversy; for the sound of an approaching motor-car broke in upon them amid the cawing of the rooks coming homeward through the rosy light of the setting sun from the distant fields; and Minna hastened

to receive her guests, Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery, who had promised to drive to Lisnabreen, the Thorntons' house, for supper. When they were staying at the bungalow which they had built close to the lake, eleven miles away, they usually drove in their car for an informal Sunday's supper with Colonel Thornton and his daughter. Mrs. Montgomery and Minna were close friends, and Colonel Thornton's father and Mr. Montgomery's had been neighbours in their young days in another part of the province. The lady and her husband were intimate with Willie Kinghan, and he had frequently found their beautiful house near Belfast, where Mr. Montgomery was engaged in business, very convenient when it was necessary for him to be in that city at assizes. He liked both the people extremely well; but he felt that he could have done very well without their company at Lisnabreen this evening. He was afraid that he would not have a chance of the chat alone with Minna, to which he had been looking forward through all the distractions of the celebration of the Anniversary and the delivery of his speech. He had known Minna since she was a little girl. He did not remember the time when they had not been Minna and Willie to one another. He had had a good deal to say to her every time he visited her home; but he had something further for her ear alone. He would not have minded if their motor had broken down halfway between the lake and Lisnabreen.

As for Minna, however, it is quite possible that she considered the possibility of such an accident from a different standpoint, and that she was greatly relieved to hear the sound of the approaching car. She was an observant young woman, and she had noticed a

certain preoccupied look in Mr. Kinghan's eyes in spite of his seeming concentration upon the great Ulster question. She was a beautiful girl of twenty-three, and she had had several opportunities of learning what the same expression meant when she had seen it on the faces of other young men. She had even seen it once before upon Willie's face, and had learned from his own lips of what it was the forerunner. She liked him so well that it was a great relief to her to hear the sound of the Montgomerys' car. And she took care that she was not left alone with Willie at any time during the evening, and that the Montgomerys should offer to give him a lift to Dearg House, which was not more than a mile out of their way to their bungalow.

"It will save your man Timmy putting the cob to the dogcart to call for you," she said; and he could not but accept the courtesy that was offered to him, when she telephoned to his house to stop the dog-cart which he had arranged to come for him to Lisna-breen. . .

But as he too was something of an observer, and had interpreted in his own way her regard for his convenience, he found it impossible to feel that either of his visits this day had been altogether successful. He was not sure if he should not regard as the least satisfactory of the incidents of the day the impression that he retained of Helen Alexander's being quite a nice girl. He had not subjected himself to the ordeal of the cordiality of the Alexanders to be made aware of the niceness of the girl; but only because he knew that James Alexander was something of a power among the Orangemen of the Division, and he did not like to have

impressed upon him that there was another nice girl besides Minna Thornton in the neighbourhood—nay, in the world.

There he was, however, recalling the pleasant confidences of Helen, and wondering. . . .

He was an ardent Ulster Unionist, and he was as determined as the rest of his fellow-colonists in Ulster not to submit to any decree made by a majority of the English House of Commons, coerced by men who could barely get a living in Ireland, that should place Protestant Ulster at the mercy of Papist Ireland. He had joined his voice with that of half a million of the most successful colonists that the world has ever known, in declaring that he was prepared to draw the sword in defence of England in Ireland—for that was what the resistance would amount to; but, all the same, like the greater number of his friends, he had not believed in the possibility of the civil war which he had prophesied. But a few words from Harold Montgomery had brought him up against the truth—what he felt was the most serious truth of the situation.

It was when he had said lightly:

"I don't think that the Nationalists of the South will march against us," that Mr. Montgomery had spoken.

"Neither do I; what I fear most is the Nationalists of Ulster."

"We should make short work of them," said Willie.

"Should we?" asked Mr. Montgomery quickly. "I am not so sure about that, remembering as I do the Belfast riots in 1886, when Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill was thrown out. I don't suppose that more than a couple of thousand men took any active part

in those riots, and yet a thousand police and soldiers—cavalry and infantry—failed to restore order for six weeks. The first thing that will happen if the Home Rule Bill is passed will be a Belfast riot—not a riot—a massacre. Half the city will be in flames—the same in Derry and Ballymena and Ballymoney and Armagh—everywhere throughout Ulster. We have seen in Belfast how little the constabulary could do even when the strength of the force is concentrated in the city, and I should like to know what they would be able to do when the rioters are not two thousand but forty thousand. Think of the shipyards, the foundries, the mills. What will the military do? Shoot down the rioters?—who will give that order?"

"Somebody will, you may be sure—Winston Churchill for choice," suggested Willie.

"He will not be such a fool, for how are the military to be respecters of persons and only shoot Unionists?" asked Mr. Montgomery. "But even supposing that the rioters come into the open to be shot and that the shooting takes place, it is safe to assume that as many Nationalists as Unionists will be killed, and what do you suppose the Nationalists of the South will do when they learn that a hundred of their own side have been slaughtered by the order of the Radical Government? You and I and everybody that knows anything of Ireland can answer that question with certainty. An attempted massacre of Protestants in Dublin—in Cork—in Limerick—in Athlone—everywhere? Who will prevent it? The constabulary?—the military? How? By shooting down the Nationalist rioters? And is this to be the inauguration of Home Rule? is the cry that will arise on all sides. Is this the price

that we have to pay for keeping a Radical Government in power to make out their £200,000,000 Budgets? What will happen then? God knows—perhaps a General Election. I cannot say. But I can say what I did on Friday last: I gave my brokers instructions to sell out £40,000 of British securities and re-invest it in America, and that is what a great many of us in Belfast are doing daily."

Willie Kinghan sat silent for some time. He had never heard so straightforward an exposition of the word *Whither?* which so many people had been saying to one another during the year.

"Then our arming and drilling will really not do anything to precipitate the crisis?" he said at last.

"Nothing whatever. Such crises do not come about by a declaration of war and a solemn massing of civilians with rifles in their hands. Civil war declares itself—a handful of boys with stones in their fists—that is enough when a city like Belfast or Derry, or a Province like Ulster has been living in a state of high tension for some years. When a lighted match is dropped blazing in the street someone puts a foot on it and no harm is done; but you had better not drop it into a powder magazine."

"Truer words never were spoken," said Colonel Thornton. "We have had enough examples of the beginnings of civil wars and rebellions all over the world, to know that there is no parade of troops in heavy marching order. There was not much of that at Lexington or on the Boston wharves where the tea ships lay, nor at John Brown's ferry. When civilians get arms in their hands—stones or sticks are just the same—they are called rioters; but a civil riot

is only a civil war on a small scale. And a week of rioting in Belfast will mean a civil war in Ulster as soon as Home Rule is declared. The police and military were unable to stamp out the riots of '64 and '86 for weeks, although every respectable person in the city was concerned in the preservation of the peace. And what will it be when there are a hundred thousand of the best people in the city pledged not to peace, but to war ? "

. . . . . .

That was only part of the conversation at the supper-table and over cigars on the terrace of the Thorntons' house, which Willie Kinghan remembered when he got to his home. And recalling so much, and having the catastrophe which he had been airily and vaguely predicting brought before his eyes, not as a vague thing for platform use but as a terrible and apparently an inevitable reality, he felt that he was a trifler—almost a traitor to the cause to which he had sworn allegiance—to allow himself to be concerned because he had not had five minutes alone with Minna Thornton, or because he had had three-quarters of an hour alone with Helen Alexander.

He did not go asleep easily.

CHAPTER XIV

ON the day after the Twelfth there is a sham fight at a village called Scarva, in the county Armagh, and although the honour of taking an active part in the combat is jealously reserved by the men living in the immediate neighbourhood of the scene of the hostilities, it is supposed to be carried on under the patronage of the Orange Institution, and representatives of various lodges afford the *assistance* necessary to maintain such a celebration from year to year. There is sometimes, indeed, almost as large a muster of onlookers as if the occasion were the supreme one in the Calendar of Orangeism. The number of camp-followers on both sides would of themselves be sufficient to cover several acres of ground, for the young, middle-aged, and even elderly women, who take charge of their relatives in the active forces, march to the field—the fields—of battle; and the menacing music of several bands sounds and resounds along the braes over which the march takes place.

What must first strike anyone watching the muster with unbiassed eyes, is the awful seriousness with which it is conducted. In a military review one notices in the faces of the men the utter lack of interest in all that is going on. They all seem thoroughly bored with the whole show: that is a sign of discipline. It is supposed that the instant the men cease to think of

themselves as parts of a machine they require looking after. The infantry are trained to regard themselves as a quick-firing machine-gun, and the cavalry to think of themselves as a projectile, and they are supposed to be as expressionless as a breast-piece or a bomb in repose. But the troops at Scarva on the Thirteenth are very different. The sham fight is the most serious business of the year of a community that is perhaps the most serious on the face of the globe. It is supposed to be indecent for anyone, participator or spectator, to smile during the day. The women, for all their finery of print frocks—turned inside out over their heads in case of rain—and hats carrying the plumage of a tropical forest, are as solemn as the men. They trudge along to the scene of that action without a word; and when the rival armies fall in preparatory to falling out and behaving accordingly, they flock to the braes and other points of vantage whence they can view the issue of the strife.

For many years the fight was as great a farce as is a day of official military manœuvres. The men slouched along—"dandhered" was their word—and fell in how and where they pleased, with an exchange of greetings with neighbours—"Bully Jimmy!" "Bully Samyell Robert!" "Ye're all there, Willyum John!" "Oh, now!" sounded from rank to rank. But the drill sergeant has now descended upon the province and the muster takes place with military precision and in soldierly silence. The plan of the battle between the adherents of James—it is an odious necessity to have this side represented in the fight, but historical accuracy must be preserved how-

ever mortifying it may be to men who are Protestants at heart—and the supporters of the Prince of Orange, is defined with some sense of military decorum—long ago there was none—and the leash is slipped and the dogs of war let loose. For some hours the hillside rolls and reeks with gunpowder, and through the clouds one becomes dimly aware of all the incidents of the action —the little attacks and repulses, the heroic stands made by the usual steadfast British squares, the rallies round the colours, the little triumphs with the shouts of "King William for ever!" "Croppies, lie down!" and others more vigorous still—until the order is given by King William himself, in the memorable words of the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo, "The whole line will advance!" There is a burst of cheering, a wild charge, and the Irish hosts are swept into the imaginary Boyne, while the drums throb to the strains of "Boyne Water," the National Anthem, and "Rule, Britannia!" All is over except the shouting and the sweat and the drinks. The plan of the battle was formerly based upon that followed, with some success, by the Duke of Wellington at Waterloo; but all this is changed. Some antiquary made the discovery that the Battle of the Boyne differed in some essentials from the Battle of Waterloo, and the result is found to be equally showy and quite as convincing. Here are Ulstermen re-enacting the old conflict between their ancestors and the Irish. Not the smallest change has taken place in the spirit of these men; the three centuries that have passed have not made them any more Irish than the original colonists from England and Scotland who crossed the Channel to drive out the Irish from Ulster. It was the

English settlers of an earlier date, in the South, who became proverbially more Irish than the Irish themselves, and it was the Protestant troopers of Cromwell's model army who married Irish Roman Catholics and, adopting their religion, founded some of the most noted Irish families. But the Plantation of Ulster remains Ulster, and every year the Irish are fought in the Battle of Scarva.

James Alexander was so good an Orangeman that he had rarely missed the sham fight on the Thirteenth since he was a boy. He had shouldered a single-barrelled muzzle-loader, on both sides in the fight, when he was one of the hands in Mr. Megarry's mill; but of late he had contented himself with a position of prominence on the brae as a spectator-representative of his own lodge; and he had every intention of being present on the day after Willie Kinghan had dined at Ardreagh; but there was that question of the boiler to settle. He had no confidence in the working powers of the boilerman unless he himself was watching his progress, and he determined that the boiler should be ready by Tuesday morning. The sham fight would most likely take place in his absence—it had gone on for a hundred years before he was born—but he was not so sure as regards the boiler. He regretted the necessity for the maimed rites of the great anniversary so far as he was concerned; but, after all, if his two sons were going to the fight, the family would be amply represented on the field or on the brae. He gave his instructions to his younger son first. He was to go by train to Scarva Junction and catch the 10.25 there to the little town. If he met Lord Innisfallen on the field he was to be sure to apologise for his

father's absence, and say that it was quite unavoidable. He was to do the same in respect of old Mr. Simpson, of the Abbey, and also Colonel Watson, the Deputy-Grand Master for Ireland.

Ned at first looked as if his own plans for the day—whatever they might be—were being interfered with; but before his father had finished giving him his instructions his face brightened up.

"All right," he said. "I'll make it all right for you; maybe they won't mind after all. And I'll tell you what it is: I'll not trust catching that train at the Junction; I'll travel the whole way on my motor-byke. It will do the forty miles in an hour and a half—oh, less; for she's running splendidly now."

"I won't have you and your motor-byke: ye be to travel by train with Jim," said his father. "Ye mind what I'm sayin'?"

"Why shouldn't I go whatever way I please?" said Ned. "Why don't you buy a proper car the same as other people, and you'd know how they'd go? The idea of spending nearly three hours in the train, or waiting for trains, on a day like this! I'll go on by byke. Don't you bother yourself about me."

"I'll give ye a clout on the lug, ye young pup, if ye talk till me in that strain," cried his father. "What's good enough for your brother should be good enough for you. I'm on swithers whether to go myself and leave you to look after yon boiler."

It was at this point that James entered the room. His father turned to him.

"You 'uns is to go till the sham fight," he said. "I be to look after yon boiler or it'll not be ready to

start work the-morrow. There's a train from Scarva Junction at 10.25."

Ned fancied that he noticed his brother's face grow long at first on receiving his orders, but then, as his own had done, it brightened up.

"I meant to go to Belfast to see Charlie and Annie," said he.

"Let them be," said his father. "It's a bit more important that you should be seen at Scarva the day."

"Perhaps it is. I wish I had a motor-byke; it takes over two hours getting to the place from here," said James. "Why shouldn't Ned go on his machine and show himself in case the train is late—it's nearly always late on the Thirteenth, for it stops at every station?"

"That's what I say—why shouldn't I?" cried Ned. "My machine is a deal more to be depended on than your old train."

Mr. Alexander thought for a few moments. It occurred to him that no bad impression would be produced upon the best people who might be attending the sham fight by the appearance of the dashing young fellow before him, on a motor-cycle. "Who is yon good-looking young chap that looks as if he would carry all before him?" Lord Innisfallen might ask; and he fancied he could hear Colonel Watson replying, "He's young Alexander, a son of James Alexander whose owe Breeney Mills."

(He assumed that Colonel Watson would speak in his own dialect of Ulster.)

But the imaginary question and reply were enough for him.

"Take your machine if you're fool enough to want

to risk your neck," he said. "But mind I'm tellin' ye, if she breaks down the day you may scrap her: I'm not one to be fooled by yon thing a second time."

"No fears," said Ned. "Let me see, when you come to Moyannan you keep straight on and over the hill, don't you?"

"To be sure you do, and when you reach Barr's lony ye take the road to the left and ye'll be saved a matter of a couple of mile," said his father.

"I'll mind," said Ned with a nod, going out of the room.

"He'll be all right, I suppose," remarked his father to James.

"Oh, he is getting into the knack of the thing," replied James, looking at the black marble clock on the mantelpiece. "Hullo! I'll have to hurry for that train," he added. "I'll send a wire to Annie from the station to say she needn't expect me."

He hurried into the yard to get his bicycle to ride to the station, and found Ned filling the tank of his machine.

"I say," whispered Ned, "it was very decent of you to put in that word for my motor-byke. It saved me from coming to loggerheads with the governor."

"That's all right; I suppose you mean to turn up at the fight?"

"Don't you see me filling up my tank? It will take every glass of spirit that I can carry to take me there and back."

James nodded and rode off on his byke, leaving Ned looking after him with the petrol can in one hand and the strainer in the other.

"I wonder what his game is. Why should he speak

up to the governor to let me ride my machine ? " was the thought that the younger of the two brothers had respecting the elder.

He had not found a reply to his question before it was time for him to start for his long ride.

Helen was on the avenue when he wheeled his machine round from the yard to test its sparking.

" Is it running all right to-day ? " she asked.

" Couldn't be better—full of juice ! " he replied, arranging a strap of his overalls.

" It would scarcely do for it to break down two days in succession," said she with the smile of the one who knows.

" It would scarcely do for it to break down even one day in succession," said he. " I wonder if Willie Kinghan is going to that rot to-day ? "

" What rot ? "

" The sham fight. Is there greater rot than the Scarva sham fight ? If you know of any you might just let me know."

" Better a sham fight now than a real one later on."

" Hallo ! what's this ? I thought that you hated everything bearing on the Ulster situation. Was it that hour's chat you had with the Counsellor yesterday that converted you ? "

" It was only half an hour ; and you're a silly ass."

CHAPTER XV

JAMES ALEXANDER thought that it was quite as well to get his sons out of the way, pending the arrival of their Uncle Richard, and the boiler business turned up quite conveniently to serve his purpose. He had not been forced by untoward circumstances to tell them a lie, or even to prevaricate to them. He had to look after his boiler and he had to look after his brother, and at the same time he wished to be represented at the sham fight; but if the fight was a sham, his explanation for sending them to witness it on his behalf was not—so far as it went. He said nothing to them, however, about the likelihood of being able to present them to an uncle whose name he thought they might have heard casually, but one whom, for some reason or other, he had not talked much about at any time of their life.

He had great difficulty in inducing his wife to believe that his story of the return of his brother was not a figment of an imagination stimulated to excess by the whisky he had drunk. Many times during the twenty-nine years of their wedded life she had had experience of the operation of the same potent agent upon his mind, so that she was not to be greatly blamed for refusing to believe, even in the sober light of the morning, that Richard had returned; and it was not until he had assured her that his brother had

been very successful in business and that he had only one child, that she had given her assent to the guest chamber being made ready for him: she agreed that the incident was a curious one, so curious that she had a suspicion that the preparation of the guest chamber would be unnecessary; but until the advance of the morning should justify her doubts, she agreed with her husband that the boys were better out of the way. Her son James had told her the day before that he meant to pay a visit to his married sister in Belfast —she was the "Annie" to whom, in conjunction with "Charlie," he had referred when his father told him that he must go to Scarva—but Edward had not expressed an intention of leaving home; and she recognised the value of the excuse about the boiler and his manipulation of it in getting the rough edge off the unexpected appearance of their uncle, so to speak—that is, if there was any such person still alive and therefore liable to turn up as live people do with much greater frequency than ghosts.

But in this connection she did not bother herself about Helen. Helen was only a girl; and moreover she had never troubled herself much about making intimate enquiries respecting her parents' relatives, and she would not be likely to do so in the case of this mysterious "Uncle Richard," whether he turned up, or justified her suspicions engendered by a glance at the whisky decanter, of his fitful existence in the imagination of her husband.

And indeed, when ten o'clock arrived, but Richard still tarried, James Alexander himself began to wonder if it might not be possible that he had taken too sanguine a view of his own powers of visualising an

occurrence which he had looked for almost monthly during the first year or two after the abrupt departure of Richard. In those days he had difficulty in understanding how such a man as Richard could allow himself to be swindled by the brother whom he had taken into partnership in his scheme for swindling his creditors. It had seemed to him impossible that he should take his victimising lying down, as it were. Richard had put his perplexity into a neat phrase the night before, when he had asked him how on earth he had refrained from hitting him a "skite" when he, James, had stood up before him and told him that if he tried to enter the wee mill, he, James, would have him, Richard, kicked out. It was the absence of any satisfactory explanation regarding this "skite" that now caused Mr. Alexander to review very carefully the phrases exchanged between himself and Richard in the moonlight, with a view to reassure himself on the subject of his speculation.

But shortly before eleven, when he could almost hear the hammers of the boilermen being thrown down while they lighted their cigarettes and, at intervals of puffing their smoke about, exchanged experiences of past "Twelfths," a car drove through the entrance to Ardreagh, with his brother seated on one side, with the easy confidence of a native, and in the "well" of the vehicle two capacious portmanteaux.

So, after all, his reputation as a reasonable drinker was restored in the sight of his wife, and to say the truth, his confidence in his own powers in the same direction was more firmly established than ever.

"Who is that man?" enquired Helen of her mother as the car went past the window of the dining-room,

where they sat writing out labels for pots of jam to be made the next day, when the household should settle down after the Twelfth.

"Bless us and save us! There was something in the story after all!" cried the mother, jumping up. "I could hardly believe my eyes when I seen the cyar birl round the gate-post. And me after biddin' Jane not to put on the hem-stitched bedspread to she heard more!"

"What do you mean? What man would come here with two portmanteaux?"

"Don't speak so loud: he'll hear you. He's your uncle, Richard Alexander."

"Uncle—my uncle? Where does he come from? Why didn't you tell us that you were expecting him? Is he going to stay?"

"How do I know? Tell me that. I had only your father's story for it, and I never let on that I took the half of it in when he told me about it last night when I went down till him in my dressing-gown, just clodded on anyhow, at one o'clock in the morning. I got him to bed; but I took it for granted that it was only the Twelfth that he was bumming about. I had to hoak him out o' thon chair to get him to come."

And then, following upon the sound of greeting in the hall, and an acrid dispute with the car-driver as to the amount of the fare, Mr. Alexander and his brother entered the room; and Helen in a glance at the stranger knew that he was her father's brother. Though possibly a year or two older, he bore an undoubted resemblance to her father.

"And me never to have set eyes upon the pair of you—but houl' on, Jimmy, for the love of God, tell

me which is the mother and which is the daughter," cried Uncle Richard, before James had said a word of introduction.

"Away out o' that with you, Richard Alexander!" exclaimed the elder lady, giving her guest a playful but still a generous slap on the arm that he extended in her direction. "Oh, but you must be sore flatterers out there where you come from! And how are ye anyway, and what d'ye mean by this surprise visit?"

"I don't want to have anything to do with you, my good woman; this is the one of the family I'm going to enfold in my arms," he turned to Helen making a motion as if actually about to embrace her. But he did not go so far. He was as undemonstrative as though he had never been out of Ulster or had never taken part in an Ulster Demonstration. The etiquette of the North of Ireland does not make the embracing of nieces *de rigueur*. He took the girl's hand and held it for a minute, looking, with a critically puckered forehead, into her face. "Heth, and you're a brave wee gyerl, so y'are. Them eyes of hers has done crule work with the chaps about here, I'll be bound. Where does she come from anyway, Jim? She's not a bit like you."

"Houl' your tongue, man dear, doesn't everybody that lays eyes on her say that she's the dead spit of her mother?" said James Alexander.

"I misdoubt if she'll ever be as fine a woman," said Richard, winking confidentially at Helen to tell her that he was only "taking a hand" at her mother, and so to allay the jealousy which he assumed she would feel if his remark were made in earnest.

"What sort of a man is this brother of yours anyway, James?" cried Mrs. Alexander. "Does he ex-

pect a body to take in all his canoodling? Away out o' that the two of ye to we get on wi' our work. It's just on swithers I am whether to turn ye out of the house, Richard Alexander, or bid ye stay on; but if ye stay I give ye notice ye must behave, so ye must. We'll have none of your flattery here, will we, Helen?"

"May I never budge but I meant all I said, and I've a lot to say forbye yon," cried Richard. "Ah, Mrs. Alexander, it's mischevious eyes that y' have still, though you are the mother of a brave lump of a gyerl like yon."

"Did ever ye hear tell o' the like o' thon?" cried the lady, turning to her husband and shaking her head.

"And all because he wants to wheedle a half-'un out of ye after his drive," said her husband.

"It's yourself that's trying your hand at wheedling now, James Alexander," said she. "But there's no half-'uns for yiz 'uns here at this time o' the day. So away with ye unto we get on wi' our work."

"I don't think that a couple of half-'uns would do a body any harm on a warm day like that. What do you say, Dick?" said Mr. Alexander.

"I'll leave it till herself," replied his brother. "She doesn't look hard-hearted, and for me, I'm that dry that if ye was to dunch up again me the dust would come out o' my mouth, so it would."

"Well, if it's like that ye be to have your own way," said the matron, going to the big mahogany sideboard, unlocking one of its ends and taking out the freshly filled decanter. A carafe of water and a siphon of soda stood with glasses and tumblers on the top of the cupboard.

"That's more homelike," said her husband, going

toward her. "It would be a quare home-coming for a man that's been away for more nor thirty years if he wouldn't be spared a sup of whisky. Here's t'ye, brother Richard."

"And here's to you and yours, James; 'Mrs. A. and Miss—I dursn't call such a gran' lady by her Christian name—where's she gone?" said Richard.

"She just slithered off when I was pouring out the whisky; but let her be. She's been to the best school in Belfast for three years and she thinks us guy and common," explained Helen's father.

"And she's right into the bargain," said his wife. "We're the commonest of the common. What's bred in the bone——"

"We don't make any pretence," said James. "There's no dam nonsense about us in Ulster. But the more I see of your haw-haw gentlemen, the better satisfied I am to be what I be, and that's as good as the best o' them; and I don't know either that I make so many mistakes in speech as some o' them 'uns. We talk correct enough for weerselves, so we do, and everybody knows that it's in Ulster and Ulster only that they pernounce correct."

"I've often heerd tell o' that, and the more I've knocked about the surer and certainter I am that it's the truth," acquiesced his brother.

"It takes us all our time in Ulster preventing our childer from lairnin' to be ladies and gentlemen too quick," said James. "But most things is done in a hurry nowadays."

"Don't you be talkin' in that way, James," said Mrs. Alexander. "Isn't it quite natchurl for them 'uns to want to become ladies and gentlemen?"

"Well, it's not me that's sayin' it isn't," replied her husband. "I suppose it is quite natchurl for the childer of good Protestants like weerselves to want to be ladies and gentlemen; but what about the Powers—don't them 'uns be trying day and night to turn their childer into ladies and gentlemen? The impidence of them Papishes trying to ape us!"

"Is that Michael Power you're talking about?" enquired Richard.

"It is," said James. "Him that has the flour mills —a Papish to the heart's core if there ever was one. If it wasn't for him there wouldn't be a chapel in five townlands. It's said that he pays the C.C. out of his own pocket; and yet he had the impidence to expect that we would let our Helen mix on equal terms with them! They give a party, or something of the like, at Christmas-time, and you'll think I'm makin' fun, but I'm danged if they didn't invite our Jimmy and Ned and Helen. Sowl and they did!"

"Houl' your tongue, James; they meant well, them Powers, so they did," said his wife.

"Heth, they did that—they meant well for their-selves," said James.

"Ballyboye, and the sky over it!" exclaimed his brother. "What call had Mickey Power to send you 'uns a ticket? He forgot hisself all thegether—a Papish like him!"

"He'll not do it again, I warrant," said James. "Man dear, if we couldn't keep a fella like yon in his place, where would we be at all?"

"Maybe that! Whereabouts does them Powers live the day? I mind Mickey well. Him and me knows

other, so we do, and I'd like to see him now for the sake of ould times," said Richard.

James turned upon him.

"What for would you do thon?" he asked curtly. "What call have you to look up a Papish? Isn't there enough of our own people to look up without bothering about them Papishes?"

"Never let on ye hear him," said Mrs. Alexander confidentially to her brother-in-law. "What for shouldn't you go to see Mickey Power if so be that ye have a mind for to go?"

"He's a black Papish—what call has he to go to see the like?" shouted her husband.

"Hould your whisht, man dear—hould your whisht to I tell ye why I'm for goin' to look him up," said Richard. "It's this way: Mickey was one o' the last chaps I seen before I cut my stick from hereabouts, thirty years ago and more, and it was him that said to me, says he, 'Dick, you're a fool, man, to go off. There's as much to be made in the ould country as anywheres else if you go the right way for to do it.' But I would have my own way, and I went, and now I be to go to him and say, 'Who was right and who was wrong, Mr. Michael Power? Here am I safe and sound with fifty thousand pounds to my credit, and a business in Melbourne that brings me in a good couple o' thousand a year—that's what come o' going away. Now, let us see how you stand, my man, for your stayin' at home? That's how I mean for to have it out with Michael."

James thumped his right fist into the palm of his left hand, crying:

"You're the man for me, Richard! dig it intill him,

my boyo. Rub it intill him—make it seventy thousand, Dick—ay, and three thousand a year—that'll be wormwood till him. Shake the moneybags in the face of him and let him know that it'll all go for to fight him and his Nationalists. Houl' on and I'll drive ye till his door: I'm on my way till the mill this minute to keep an eye on them chaps at the boiler. I'll drop ye on the way. Rub it intill him, my lad, rub it intill him!"

"Never heed yon fool-man: he doesn't know what he's gabbin' about," said Mrs. Alexander, pulling Richard by the sleeve—her husband had already left the room and was bawling for the car—it was not a motor-car, but the handy Irish jaunting-car which, with one horse, could carry six passengers and a driver—the family vehicle of the Alexander household.

"What ails him again the Powers anyway?" asked Richard.

"What should ail him about them without that they're Papishes? Isn't that enough?" replied the lady.

"Heth, and it seems that there's some sour feelin' again the Papishes in these parts still," said Richard.

"Sour feelin'?—sour? I'm tellin' ye it's just butter-milk that's been left standin' a whole week," she replied.

CHAPTER XVI

THEY were both Ulstermen, so they did not see the queer humour of the tableau—the man who, without the slightest compunction, had robbed his brother of his property, and sent him into exile for over thirty years, driving jauntily and cheerfully along the road leading to that property, on his return; and both of them taking it for granted—or pretending they were doing so—that there was nothing whatever out of the ordinary in the situation. But they were both Ulstermen, so that it may be taken for granted that each was thinking his own thoughts on this subject, though without "letting on" to the other what was the exact trend of these thoughts.

They had plenty to talk about, for the road went through a country with which they had both been familiar in their young days, and James was fully occupied making his brother acquainted with the many changes that had taken place since the latter had gone as a steerage passenger from Belfast to Liverpool, whence he had shipped to South Australia with seventy pounds of fraudulent cash in his pocket, and in his heart—well, what he fancied was in his heart was a feeling of hard resentment against the brother who had robbed him after joining with him in robbing his creditors; but it really was a feeling of resentment against himself for having been so great

a fool as to trust that same brother of his. A great many changes had naturally taken place in the neighbourhood. Most of the older generation had died in the long interval. Thirty-two years represents the growth of a generation; and with reference to this particular neighbourhood the returned exile summarised the principal changes thus:

"The chaps that sprung from nothing has gone and left their sons to grow into gentlemen."

"And some o' them has done it, and some hasn't," commented James shrewdly.

There were a few failures to record, and there were some cases of fathers who had inherited from a Scotch forefather an irresistible tendency to drink, and had succumbed—mostly at a ripe age—to its indulgence, having transmitted the same weakness to their sons, and even their daughters, with deplorable results. But while he mentioned these, James Alexander did so without any feeling one way or another. He did not chuckle over the grim decree that when the fathers eat sour grapes the children's teeth are set on edge, nor did he moralise upon the vice of intemperance generally. He was an unprejudiced historian of the neighbourhood. Yon house that Richard disremembered seeing in the old days had been built by young Haslett, whose father had had the bleach green long ago, and young Haslett had become a Plymouth Brother and preached every Sunday and as many weekdays as he could get people to listen to him; but he was that close-fisted that it was generally thought that if he contributed more to the welfare of the workers' bodies and made fewer attempts upon their souls he would be better liked. Who lived at the Towers

now? Why, surely he must have heard, even in Australia, that Lord Glasslough had leased the Towers to Sir Samyell Driscoll, the Belfast shipowner who was made a baronet before his death. As decent a man as ever walked on shoe leather, though for that matter he had not walked on much of it in his young days. But his son Johnny was cleverer even nor his father in making a bargain. One day Johnny didn't turn up at the office for a couple of days, and then in walks my gentleman and takes his seat at his desk as if he had never left it. "H'm; so ye've appeared at last," said his father. "Ay, I've come," sez Johnny. "So I see," sez his father, "and may I preshume to ask where y've been this two days?" "Well," says Johnny, "I thought that as things was quare and quiet here, I'd run across and see what sort of a place Glasgow was that I heerd tell about so often." "Ay, did ye though?" sez his father; "and what did ye think of it when ye did see it?" "Not much," sez he; "but it's a quare big place." "So I've heerd tell," sez his father. "Is that all?" "Well," sez Johnny, "I took a look down the docks. They're a quare size, so they are, and they was quare and throng with ships." "That's what they were made for," sez his father. "And is that all?" "Well, I seen a steamer that was for sale, and I heerd that she was goin' quare and cheap." "Did ye though?" "Ay, and I just bought her for eighteen thousand pound." "Did ye though?" sez his father. "Well, ye may just pay for her out of your own pocket, for I'm danged if ye'll get any money out o' me for her. We've steamers enough rusting away now that freights is so low. Heth, you're a boy! Dam the penny

you'll get out of me, you and your steamers." "She was a nice wee steamer, and quare and cheap at eighteen thousand," sez Johnny. "All the better for you," sez he. "Ye'll have the less to pay for her, you and your wee steamer, for dam the penny ye'll get out o' the firm for her." "It doesn't matter," sez Johnny. "Doesn't it though?" "No, it doesn't, for I sold her later in the day for twenty-two thousand till a man I met in the cabin when I was crossing that told me he was on his way to Glasgow to buy a wee steamer." "Ay," sez his father after a while, when he managed to get the thing intill his head. "Ay, you'll do, Johnny; but you were a fool to sell her for the money." "Ay," sez Johnny. "I'm thinkin' myself that I sold her quare and cheap."

Other anecdotes he had to tell about the new generation, who did not seem wanting in the business acumen that had made their fathers rich men; and between these anecdotes Richard reminded him of some of the funny things that were circulated through the countryside about some of the older generation—about the tailor from Belfast who had bought yon house—Lake Lodge was its name—and set up as a gentleman on the strength of the knighthood he received when Mayor of Belfast; and when he found himself on one knee at the feet of the Lord Lieutenant for the ceremony, he was so excited that he forgot where he was, and slipped a tape measure out of his pocket and had it round the calf of His Excellency, calling out as he did every day in his shop, the different measurements—"eleven and a half—eight and a quarter, full—sixteen—side pockets, try on Tuesday."

"As decent a man as ever lived. He was a Presbyterian, but that wasn't good enough for his daughters and they become Church, because the Church was handier to their house, forbye bein' more genteeler," was the comment of James; and Richard was advancing to another reminiscent story when his brother interrupted him.

"Ye be to get off here," he said, as the car stopped at cross roads. "Ye be to go the rest of the way without my help. Ye see yon house with the big cedar fornenst it—that's it. I wouldn't shame a Protestant mare by driving her up to the door of a Papish. Down ye get."

"And I suppose I'll have to walk back my lone?" said Richard when he had dismounted.

"Heth and ye will. It'll do you good, so it will," cried James, nodding to the driver to proceed, and proceed he did.

Richard stood on the road and watched him, not without admiration.

"By the holy poker, he has the nerve of the devil himself," he muttered. "It's no wonder that he has got on. How could anybody expect to get the better of that fella? Well, we'll see."

He turned down the road that trended to the right in the direction of the grey house, half obscured by an immense cedar which his brother had pointed out. It was a house of moderate size, making no more claim to architectural distinction than the great square building of red brick that stood at the end of a narrow lane two or three hundred yards away—the flour mill owned by Michael Power—Richard remembered the old mill, but somehow he had looked for it to have grown

since he had last seen it. Usually the returned exile finds that the houses which he had seen in his youth have shrunk wonderfully in his absence; but Richard Alexander found that everything had been growing since he had been last in this neighbourhood. Everything had been, like his "wee mill," getting additions tacked on in unexpected places, so that some of them seemed quite huge to his eyes. Certainly he found that Ulster had made progress within thirty years: the most picturesque parts had become dirty with industry. The tall black shaft of a chimney rising from the midst of a block, with many excrescences, marked the potentialities of a 10 per cent dividend. But the flour mill did not seem to have increased. Fortunes had been gathered out of its dust in the past; but that was when farmers in the neighbourhood grew wheat as well as flax; now other countries make fortunes by sending them in thousands of tons to Ireland.

He stood for a while looking over the hedge that was between the house and the road; and he saw that the garden was well kept. Away from the shadow of the cedar the roses were flaming in beds and borders and over the porch of the house. And while he stood there, a man of about his own age came through a small gate in the wall, disclosing, as he opened it, a picture of trees in an enclosed orchard beyond, and advanced with a rake to one of the rose beds nearest the hedge. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and he walked in so leisurely a way as to suggest the working-man rather than his employer. He gave a glance at the head and shoulders of the stranger looking over his hedge; but only a glance, and then began to rake the earth around

the roses. He worked his way round the bed without looking again in the direction of Richard, and when his back was turned to the hedge, Richard said :

"That's a Protestant-looking garden, so it is, Mr. Power."

(In the most Roman Catholic parts of Ireland cleanliness and neatness are attributes ascribed to the Protestants ; in Ulster the Catholics go further, and refer to a good-looking man as having a Protestant face.)

The man turned quickly round and looked in a puzzled way at the speaker.

"Ay," he said, "I'm glad you like it ; but if you tell me who you are I'll feel the compliment the more, I'm sure."

"Ye'll have to guess, Michael, my man," said Richard.

Mr. Power came close to the hedge and peered into the face of the other.

"I'm beat," he said after a long scrutiny. "I'm beat. I somehow seem to have heard the voice before, but your face—no, it's beat I am—fairly beat."

"Ay," said Richard, "but ye were beat a bit harder the day ould Reavy come and caught us among his plums—eh, Mickey ; 'twas yourself that was beat sound, for, as you know, I haked it up the lony without a skite."

"Holy Moses ! if it ben't Dick Alexander ! " said the other. "Ay, faith, him or—— Save us, Dick ! Do I look as old as that ? "

"Ay, every day as old, though you haven't been more'n a mile or two on the far side of the Lagan within thirty years, while I've been all over the world. But you're a healthy specimen of a dam Papish all the

same. The holy water can't keep Time, the ould divil, at arm's length, so it can't."

"Come round, man, and tell me all your news—I hope you've got something newer than that for my ears, Dick Alexander."

Richard walked to the entrance gate with Power on the other side of the hedge, and the two old men, who had parted thirty-two years earlier, stood together on the gravel drive and shook hands, not fervently, but as quietly as if they had only separated the day before.

"Come into the house and tell me how you've been getting on. Man, but you're not so old as you might be. It's sixty-two that you are, I suppose. Maybe I don't know."

"Ye know rightly. It's a wheen of years; but I'm good for another twenty or more. My father drank himself to death at eighty-seven."

"You've done well for yourself in life, Dick, I can see that with half an eye. You were wiser nor me, for d'ye mind, I bid you give up the notion of setting out for Australia."

"I mind well. Ay, I never made myself a fool takin' anybody's advice."

They had entered the house and seated themselves in a dining-room that seemed large out of proportion to the size of the house, and Mr. Power had, of course, put the whisky decanter and tumblers on the table.

"Well, here's to you anyway," said the host as they raised their glasses.

"Ay, what they call Auld Lang Syne," said his guest.

They drew a breath and wiped their mouths.

"Save us! I never thought to set eyes on you

again, Dick," said Mr. Power. "But I'd sooner see you nor your brother."

"What's betwixt you anyway, forbye his fool talk about Papishes? I'm nigh sick of him and his Papishes already, though I haven't been more'n an hour or two in his company since I come back."

"Oh, let him be, let him be," said Mr. Power. "He has never harmed me."

"If he hasn't, it's not for the want of trying; I could take my davy to that," growled Richard. "I'm sayin', Michael, I'm thinkin' that this is about the only place left in His Majesty's dominions where the ould animosity remains betwixt us and you. I disremembered while I was in Australia all that I had lairned here; but when I heerd the drumming in Belfast on Saturday, and saw the Orange arches, it all come back to me."

"And now it's going to be worse nor ever," said Mr. Power. "I'm thinking that it will be no place for me or mine when this Home Rule Bill becomes law. However things may go it'll be a sore look-out for the Catholics in the North."

"Anybody but a fool could see that plainly," assented Dick. "And, mind, when I've said that I've said the most I'm going to say about Home Rule. Now tell me about yourself and all that belongs to you, Michael. There was a boy in the cradle before I left."

"That's Danny—he's married in Canada—married and doing well, thank God."

"Any others?"

"Ay, there's another boy—Jack his name is. I put him into business in Belfast; but it was no use:

Catholics don't rise to anything good in Belfast. Here he has been home for the past year, though what he doesn't know about linen isn't worth knowing."

"Houl' on. I'll have a look at him before I leave. I've done well for myself, as maybe I let on to you just now. I have a store at Melbourne and three managers. Ay, I'll have a look at him—mind, I don't say that I'll do anything for him: I'm not fool enough to buy a pig in a poke, but I'm sayin' that I'll have a good look at him. Never let on till him about it. You've only the two?"

"There's a girl—Kate. There she is, coming through the gate."

He nodded in the direction of the window: Richard was sitting with his back to it, but he turned at the nod.

"And a crool nice girl she is, and a crool nice young fella by her side. That's her brother, I can see for myself, and a fine boy he is."

"Get out o' that with you," chuckled Michael Power. "It's the sore bad uncle that you are, Dick, not to know your own nephew. You're brave and clever, but you don't know your brother's son when you see him. That's Ned Alexander, the youngest of them."

"Walking with a daughter of yours?"

"I don't care a dam, my man. I've done nothing to help it and I've done nothing to hinder it. I know better nor to forbid him the house or to forbid my girl talking to him, for all that his father is a rabid Orangeman and me a Catholic. I don't want anything to come of it, but if anything does come of it I won't feel that I was to blame. I've seen enough of boys and

girls to know that they'll have their own way in the face of all that fathers and mothers and Orangemen and Papists may say."

"And ye don't care a curse for James?"

"Not a midge's curse. I'm as good a man as him, for all I'm a Papish! There!"

"By God y'are, Michael, and a dam sight better! Shake! God! We'll squeeze the life out o' that brother o' mine yet. Give us another half-'un!"

They stood up together and raised their glasses and drank together.

They knew that they were going through an Ulster form of contract—a more convenient one, all things considered, than kissing the hilt of a sword, and doubtless, up to a certain point, more hygienic.

Mr. Power pushed open the window and called out:

"Edward—Edward, come intill the house to I introduce you till your uncle."

Edward Alexander looked puzzled at first, then he gave a laugh and said a word or two to the handsome girl by whose side he had just sat down under the cedar. They went to the window together.

"So you're Edward, are ye?" said Richard. "Have ye ever by any chance heard your father speak lovingly of a long-lost brother? No? I thought not; well, I'm that brother he never spoke of, and I brought my swag to your father's house a couple of hours ago, and he drove me here, or as near here as his Orange-stained conscience would let him, and he bid me walk home my lone; but maybe you'll give me your company."

"I don't know whether you're taking a hand at me or not," said Ned. "But if you are in earnest, I can

offer you a seat on the spring of a motor-byke, with pleasure."

"Then before we set out, will you introduce me to the young lady? How do you do, miss? Now you can testify at the inquest that I was sober when I left, and you can boast for the rest of your life that you were the last female that Dick Alexander spoke till."

CHAPTER XVII

ALL the time that his Uncle Dick was paying some dreadfully obvious compliments to the young lady, easily making her blush by their breadth, and then, Ulster fashion, making fun of her for blushing; and not going very far toward restoring her equanimity, by pointing to her and leaving it to the judgment of everyone present to decide if blushing wasn't becoming to her in the highest degree, Edward Alexander was trying to recollect where he had heard of this new-found uncle. He had a definite impression of having been made aware of the fact that he had, or that he had had, an Uncle Richard, but with this impression came the certainty that he had never heard this fact from his father or his mother. He somehow fancied that the memory of an Uncle Richard went back to his young days—yes, he had a vague impression of an elder boy having reproached him, one day, with having a father and an uncle associated with the carrying out of some discreditable act; it was true, the boy had affirmed, because he had heard his own father say that he was badly done by the pretty pair of rascals—James and Richard Alexander. The boy refused to take back the word rascals—the details of the affair now came rushing upon him—and the result was that his young friend went back to his parents with a puffed nose and a touch of blue over the left eye.

"A pretty pair of rascals." Well, his father was within easy reach, and here was his father's brother making himself quite at home in this house with Mr. Power and Mr. Power's daughter Kate; and with this thought came another, to the effect that the general idea that prevailed at his father's house was that he himself was assisting at a fête commemorating a great Protestant victory, instead of being under the roof of a Papist and by the side of a Papist's very pretty daughter. No one could deny the beauty of the Papist's daughter; but no North of Ireland Protestant worthy of the name would admit the attractiveness of the young woman as an extenuating circumstance in estimating the extent of his, Edward's, indiscretion—to call it by no stronger name—in changing his route on his motor-bicycle for the second time within three days.

He was about as shrewd a youth as might be found in the province; and he appreciated his position and the possible need for explaining it in the near future—perhaps before he slept. He had accepted Mrs. Power's invitation to the usual half-past two dinner, and when he glanced across the table at his uncle, who was in high spirits, he could not help feeling that it should be a source of great gratification to many worthy persons who might find themselves now and again in a situation requiring some explaining away, that there are a good many rascals to meet with from time to time. It was a great relief to him to reflect that this merry uncle of his was not a high-minded gentleman. There was nothing of the high-toned Judge Flinn about this merry Uncle Dick, and Edward felt quite equal to an attempt to come to

terms with him. With this confidence in his own tact and in his uncle's low-toned sense of morality, it was impossible for him to have any feeling of depression while at the table or when eating strawberries in the orchard with Kate Power a little later. The immediate future did not cast a shadow upon his holiday. His holidays were few, and he regarded the Victory at the Boyne as deserving of all the honour it received in the North of Ireland, since it enabled him to spend the greater part of two whole days in the company of the girl whom he loved.

Of course he deplored—at rare intervals—the necessity to pursue a moral route with many turnings and twistings in it, in order to escape from the household consequences of his acts: he had not planned out any line of life for himself that involved the telling of lies; but he was sufficiently high-toned not to shrink from a lie or two in the sacred cause of domestic peace. He had not kept himself abreast of modern scientific research in all its branches; but he had read enough to be well aware of the fact that the man-child, as well as every other animal, comes straight from heaven, a ready-made little liar; and that the Lie has always been the dominant spirit in Nature; without it seven-eighths of the animal and vegetable world would be swept out of existence; and perceiving all this with his natural shrewdness, he did not feel any greater twitches of conscience on account of the success of his tergiversation than is experienced by a successful general on finding out that he has caused his opponent to believe that he was making an attack in force from the left when he was preparing to make it from the right.

In the same spirit, he estimated at their proper value, not their face value, the denunciations by his father of the Lie. That was quite reasonable, he thought: the shark in search of a dinner among the coloured corals and gorgeous sea-weeds of the Barrier Reef would be ready to denounce the tricks of the gorgeous fishes of the lagoon, who pretended that they were nothing more palatable than coral and sea-weeds, and so allowed him to go hungry away to catch those that had a soul above deception and would die sooner than take anyone in. Sharks and little fishes—they make up the people of the world, he perceived, and the little fishes had to make up their minds to take in the sharks, or to be taken in by the sharks. He was no more of a cynic than a scientist must be who looks at things as they are, not as, in the opinion of parsons and parents and sharks, things should be; and he knew that among the Ten Commandments there is not one that prohibits the Lie unless it be to the hurt of a neighbour.

And so he partook of an excellent dinner, and was greatly pleased to find his uncle so interested in Jack Power, the son of the family who was not wanted in Belfast, but who might possibly be able to earn seven or eight hundred a year in Australia. He could see that his uncle was drawing out the young man very artfully. He expected that his turn to be examined in the same way would come later; and it was in view of this likelihood that he thought it well to be quite frank with his uncle when they left the Powers' house late in the afternoon.

"I want to get on good terms with yon thing against

the time I be to mount her," said Richard, when Ned had brought round his two-wheeled motor and pointed out the meagre accommodation provided for travellers by such machines. "Just take a birl down the road to I see how she goes. I'll dandher along my lone for a bit, and maybe I'll overtake you, not with you on the top of your machine, but with the machine on the top of you."

They said good-bye to the family, and Ned went on his "birl" while his uncle went on his "dandher." The former made a two-mile circuit of the roads and overtook his uncle sitting on a comfortable stone at the side of the hedge a few hundred yards from the house they had left.

"Man, but yon's the canny travellin'!" said Richard. "It beats all that I ever seen or heerd tell of. I shouldn't wonder if you'd break your neck over her one o' these days."

"I don't think there is much danger in it," said Ned. "A chap is bound to take some risk in these days."

"Maybe that now. And you don't think that your takin' overmuch in these excursions?" said his uncle interrogatively.

"Meaning that the machine may——"

"There's more dangersome risks nor yon! Heth, you're a boy! you and your wee Papish gyerl—you be to be at the fight at Scarva the day—you and your brother—I heerd all about it, so I did—and I'd hardly sat myself down at Mr. Power's before him and me sees you comin' up the avenue as bold as brass. Heth, you *are* a boy!"

Ned laughed brightly.

"Well, all I can say is that the fight I was going to was a sham," said he.

"Well?"

"Well, can't I say that I was at a sham fight?"

"I'm beginning to think that you're the sort that wouldn't mind what you'd say. I wouldn't put anything past you, so I wouldn't. A sham fight! By the holy poker, when your father hears tell of your goings on it'll not be a sham fight there'll be, I'm telling you."

"I dare say; anyhow I'll take the risk of his hearing anything about to-day from you."

"Will you though? You'd be a fool then. What's to hinder me from goin' to your father and tellin' him that his son went till no Scarva the day, but spent his time pickin' strawberries with the gyerl of the biggest Papish in the country?"

"There's only one thing that'll hinder you, Uncle Richard, and that is that no money would induce you to do anything so mean."

"How th' hell do you know what money would tempt me or would not tempt me?—tell me that."

"I know it by the way you looked at Kate. I shouldn't wonder if you were once in love with a girl in these parts who had eyes like Kate's; and mind you, I'm going far when I allow that any girl ever had eyes like her in these parts or any other. By the living Jingo! I'm right, though I only made a shot at it: you were in love with a girl."

Richard Alexander stared at the youth for a long time, and then let his eyes wander away to the distant hills beyond Darragh. There were coverlets shot

through with gold threads, flung over them in many places where, through the floating white clouds, the sunlight flashed. Edward had pulled himself up suddenly: he had begun with a smile; but now his face was as grave as his uncle's.

"I'm sorry," he said in a humble voice. "I didn't mean to — to — awaken any — I'm very sorry."

He put out his hand; and kept it held out though it did not seem that his uncle saw it. More than a minute had passed before Richard appeared to come to himself. A sound came from him like a sudden gasp; he looked at Edward as if he had never seen him before; then at his hand, as if he failed to understand its import. In another second, his big right hand had swooped down upon it with a sound like the bursting of a tyre. He held the boy's hand tight for a long time, then dropped it suddenly, and walked away for half a dozen steps. Then he seemed to pull himself together. He returned quickly.

"Listen to me this time, for it's the first and only time I've ever spoke to mortal man about it, and it'll be the last," he said, and though there was not the least sentimental inflection in his voice, and though it was not lowered as an actor's voice would have been in referring to a pathetic incident of a long-dead past, yet through its grim and unyielding hardness, the young man to whom he spoke knew that every word came out of the depths of a soul whose eyes were looking into the past and thence into the spaces of what might have been. "Listen to me, young fella. I don't know how you come to know it, and I don't care either. She was a gyerl I met at Armagh, and I

fell in love with her. She was a Catholic, and I give her up. That's all. I give her up—I give her up! I suppose you fancy you know what a struggle it was. You know nothing about it. The stronger a man is, the worse the struggle is. It was like tearing the heart out of my body and tramping on it. That's what it meant to be living among a pack o' bigots. She was a Catholic and I had to give her up, and I've never had a day's happiness since, and that's thirty-five years ago. She would have made another man of me; but you're old enough to know what it means to a chap who has been a strong Protestant and an Orangeman to marry a Catholic in these parts. You know it, and—you're looking to do it."

Edward nodded assent.

"Ay, you're looking to do it, and do it you will, and by God, sir, I'll stand by you. I'll try to make amends for my damned nonsense by seeing you through with this. The thought come to me when I seen you and her with that light in your eyes—in her eyes—There's the way to have my revenge upon—upon—what name can I give it?—let's call it the spirit of Christian bigotry that stood between me and happiness—that's what I wanted to be revenged upon—that, and your——a man that played off a cheat upon me thirty-two years ago. I won't name any name——"

"You needn't."

"No, I needn't. But here you are now. If your father throws you off when he finds out about your courtin'—your choice, just you turn till him and says you, 'Go to——' no, I don't mean that, of course; I'm

not the one that would bid you treat your father with disrespect, but anyway, you can bid him mind his own business and leave you to mind yours. And then come till me, and I'll lairn you how to live in another land in peace with your neighbours, Catholics and Protestants alike. That's what would have happened in time in Ulster, if them chaps hadn't knuckled down to the Nationalists to save their own salaries and keep themselves in office, and so put back the country another hundred years."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir; but I don't think it will be necessary for us to go away," said Ned.

"Do you expect that your father'll give his consent to your marrying a Papish?"

"I won't ask it. I'm twenty-six years of age. I know my own mind. What do I want with my father's consent?"

"He'll kick you out of his house—out of his mill," Ned laughed.

"My dear uncle, make your mind easy: he'll never do that," he said.

"Won't he though? That's all *you* know."

"It's not all I know. I know something else. There would be no good in my telling you all now; you'll hear plenty when the time comes. It'll be enough for me to remind you just at present that you've had some experience of my father."

"Heth, and I have surely. He could get the better of the ould boy himself."

"Well, think of me as his son."

"The son of the ould boy?"

"The son of my father. We're a progressive people

in Ulster; so it would be odd if I couldn't hold my own against my father."

"*I* couldn't: it was him that held my own again me."

"There you are, you see: he was younger than you, so he had progressed enough to do you. I'm his son, and I'm progressed enough to—well, to hold my own against him."

"Bully boy! But what do you call your own forbye the clothes you stand up in?"

"Don't press me to tell you anything more just now. You know what's the relative position of fathers and sons in Ulster. I'm not talking now of the exceptions, only of the general rules—the traditional standing of the father and the son. The son is in a worse position than the errand boy—the boy that cleans the boots. You know the way we have to give an account of ourselves wherever we may go. If I go as far as Belfast for a day, I'm cross-examined as to how I have spent every hour. If I get asked out anywhere here, I have to ask leave to go. I'm not supposed to make an acquaintance without my father's leave. Three years ago he followed me up to Belfast, and when I went in with a man who was a member of the club to have a game of billiards after lunch, he came in and, without so much as a word of greeting to the others, caught me by the arm. 'Put away yon stick,' he said, 'and come along with me, you and your billiards!' I had to go; but a nice fool I looked. How could I ever hold up my head among those people again? He makes me go to church twice every Sunday, even when he doesn't do it himself. I was twenty-one when he knocked a cigarette out of my mouth

and stood before me with his fist in my face, calling me an impudent young whelp, and threatening what he'd do if he ever caught me smoking. I daren't smoke even now except behind his back. Well, is it any wonder that when we're treated like this, we sons turn out liars and hypocrites? Is it any wonder that we try to get the better of our fathers and show them that we have souls of our own?"

"I'm not going to set you or any other son again his father," said the uncle. "It's a good old Commandment that says 'Honour thy father and thy mother.' Don't you fancy, young fella, that I'm going again the Word of God: you be to honour your father as long as——"

"As long as the bank honours his cheques?"

"I refuse to joke upon the Word of——"

"That's Ulster to the backbone. Well, just you wait here while I return to Kate Power and tell her that I'm sorry, but she has seen the last of me for ever. I'll tell her that you have pointed out my line of duty to me."

He pretended to be about to mount his machine.

"What's the fool-boy about anyway?" cried his uncle. "If you don't turn the head of thon thing in the other direction it'll not be tellin' ye: I'll gie ye a bat on the side of the head that'll make ye wonder what's the matter with ye, so I will. I'll put the fear of God intill ye, my lad, if you're going jukin' about that girl. D'ye mind what I'm tellin' ye?"

"Sowl, I do that," said Ned with a laugh, putting on the broad accent which his uncle had apparently not lost in spite of his long absence from his native

province. "I'm sorry I can't repeat my offer of a lift home, for now that I come to think of it you haven't been to the sham fight, while I have. Don't you forget that, sir: I've been to the sham fight—that's to say, the fight that I've been to was a sham."

CHAPTER XVIII

A LITTLE manœuvring among unfrequented roads brought Edward to the lane leading to a small farm, about two miles on the way he should have taken if he had gone to Scarva in the morning. He saw Mrs. McCutcheon, the farmer's wife, and got from her a drink of milk. He assured her that the sham fight had been a lively one this year, and he wondered if she could spare his mother a bottle of cream. A visitor was expected at Ardreagh, and the Twelfth had interfered with the household supply, which was very awkward, considering how the strawberries were lasting. The good woman was able to oblige him, so that when he reached his home half an hour later, properly covered with dust, he was in a position to enter the room where his father and mother were sitting with a stranger, and to say:

"Amn't I tired just! Is that soda water in the siphon?"

"A machine like thon isn't the thing for a teetotaler," said his father grimly.

"I'm not so thirsty as all that," said Edward; "for I called at the McCutcheons' farm and had a drink of milk on my way home, and Mrs. McCutcheon sent you a bottle of cream—here it is."

"She's a decent body," said his mother. "How did she know that we wanted cream? Did you tell her that your Uncle Richard was with us?"

"My uncle——" began Ned, and turned eyes full of surprise upon his uncle.

"Oh, I disremembered that you had left before he arrived. This is your Uncle Richard from Australia."

Edward was quite cordial in his greeting of the stranger, and his uncle enquired if the young gentleman was the elder son. He was informed that he was the second, and he showed that he was interested in the youth by asking if he was in the mill.

"Oh, ay, he's by way o' being in the mill; but he could go off this morning for his fun at Scarva, leavin' me to go till the mill and watch them boiler-men," said his father. "But he be to have his fun like the rest o' them."

"Never heed him, Richard," cried Mrs. Alexander. "He knows as well as anybody that Ned is first-rate in the mill. Didn't he contrive that pin-push feeder last year—now tell the truth?"

"And what's the pin-push feeder when all's told? Couldn't anybody that has been for a month or two in a mill contrive that thing?" said James. "I'm not sayin' that I'll not make a man of Ned yet. He'd get on all right if it wasn't for his cleverness. He thinks himself mighty clever. He may take himself in, but he can't take me in. Was there a big crowd at Scarva the day, boy?"

"The biggest for years," replied Ned, giving a glance at his uncle.

"I suppose Joe Campbell was there?" said his father.

"You would have thought that the fight wouldn't have come off without him," said Ned. "I think I'll have a bath before supper. Has Jim returned yet?"

"Not yet. Did he say what train he was coming by?" asked his mother.

"I didn't get within speaking distance of him," replied Edward. "I saw a big crowd on the brae, and I took it for granted that he was there. But down below there was a nasty lot of boys, and I thought it best not to leave my machine."

"What ailed ye that ye didn't ride her up the brae and show that James Alexander's son had the spunk o' the best o' them?" cried his father.

"I didn't think that that would be worth the money I paid for the machine," said Ned, going out of the room.

"Not a bad-looking boy for an Alexander," was the comment made by Richard.

"I'm glad you like him," said his brother.

"I suppose none of them's married yet?" asked Richard.

"Only Annie—our Annie is the only one of the four that's married," said Mrs. Alexander. "Annie married Charlie Drennan, a son of Hugh Drennan, the solicitor: he's in his father's office in Belfast and doin' well, though he hasn't made me a grandmother yet. It's a sore point with Annie."

"It sometimes is; but if they haven't been married long there's plenty of time for them to change their mind," said Richard. "And what is that pin-push feeder that ye were talking about?" he enquired of his brother.

"Oh, a simple thing enough: it's a wonder that nobody thought of it years ago," replied James.

"Maybe that. Ay, I've heard that about a wheen o' things like yon: the most inventions is that simple,

a body wonders how it took years to discover them."

"The pin-push feeder isn't a bad notion by any means," said James indulgently. "And I'm just as glad that it was someone in the Breeney Mills that come by it. In these days of cut prices, any saving of labour makes a differs. I don't say but what the lad has something in him."

"You haven't made either of them a partner yet?"

James opened his mouth and stared at his brother.

"Man dear, ye must think me the quare fool!" he said.

"Because you didn't take one of them, at least, into partnership? Well, maybe——"

"No; but to ask me such a question. You think I'd let anybody but James Alexander have a voice in the management of yon concern?"

"I mind that you wouldn't let even the rightful owner have anything to do with it; so I suppose it would be ridic'lous to expect that you would allow anyone else."

James laughed heartily over this excellent jest of his brother's; to be sure it was against himself; but its sly and subtle humour made an irresistible appeal to him: he was greatly tickled by the reminiscence.

"I'm the master now, and I mean to show it," he said, when he had regained seriousness. "Labour troubles—I've had none of them. For why? I tell ye why. It's because the reins is held by me, and me only, and the men knows it. They know that at the first talk of a strike I'd clod the whole jing-bang of them out into the road and close the mill sooner nor

listen to their lip. That's James Alexander, and they know it."

"There's something in that."

"Ay, I'm thinkin' that there is something in that, Dick, my man. And I'm tellin' ye this: if I could get the Protestants of the North to take a firm hand the day Home Rule is proclaimed we'd have no more bother."

"Man alive, aren't y'all going to take a firm hand —a firm hand with a rifle in it?"

"It could be managed without rifles—I'm opposed to bloodshed."

"That's because you're too soft."

"Don't try on any of your jokes with me. I'm talking sense now. I'm a merciful man, and not a shot would be fired if I could help it. No; all that I'd like to see done is for every Protestant employer of labour of any sort in Ulster to dismiss every Catholic in his employment—for every Protestant woman who has a Catholic servant to discharge her—for all the Protestants to bind themselves not to lay out a penny-piece in the shop of a Catholic. Let them carry out that plan of campaign in Ulster and they'll very soon make short work of Home Rule. We're too good to the Catholics in Ulster. That's what has brought about all the mischief: we should have kept them in their proper place. I met Peter O'Rorke—you'll mind ould Peter that had the pawnshop?"

"Ay, do I. Is he to the fore yet?"

"He is that. Well, I come across him, and bid him the time o' day just as some of the chaps was takin' out the drums. 'Any sign o' Home Rule, Peter?' cries I, and a chap with a fife struck up 'Boyne Water.'

Man, ye should ha' saw his face, as he turned on us. 'Ay, yiz 'uns have had it all your own way for a couple o' hundred years, but, by God, our turn's comin' now—our turn's comin' now, and ye'll see something then that'll astonish you, so ye will!'"

"He said that?"

"May I never budge but them was his very words! And the chaps only laughed. 'Ye may laugh now, but it's gurnin' ye'll be after a bit,' says he. I seen the time when the Papish that talked that way would be made short work of; but we've been hearing nothing this long time but to hold ourselves in to the signal is give, and fellas like Peter knows that and is ready with their lip. We'll let them see if their turn's come, for when their turn comes, our turn'll ha' come to kick them out. They'd go out to-morrow it I had my will."

"I wish you'd told me that sooner, it would have made something to talk about at Michael Power's the day. I suppose you'd be for driving out the Powers with the rest?"

"At the head of them—at the head of them! And now that you've introduced the name of Power, I may tell ye, Richard, that I've been thinkin' about you goin' there the day, and now I say till ye, that I'd thank ye not to be talkin' outside about you goin' to the Powers on friendly terms. I want to live on friendly terms with all neighbours, but it wouldn't shuit me to have people nudgin' other and whisperin' that there was dealings between this house and the Powers."

"I see that—I see that. But if you'll take my advice, James Alexander, you'll not give me orders who I'm to visit and who I'm not to visit. I was fool

enough to let you have the whip hand of me wonst, but I'll never do it again."

"Don't you be makin' a fool of yourself now, Dick, gettin' hot over nothing. Man dear, didn't I only give ye a hint for your own good? I don't want the people about here to say that you'd taken up with the Papishes since ye went till Australia."

"Oh, maybe that. Uncommon thoughtful you are, James."

"Come and have a jap o' whisky for to give ye an appetite for your supper."

They had their whiskies to prepare them for the delicacies of the tea-table, which was already being spread by a maid.

The meal had scarcely been begun a little later, when Ned sauntered into the room, and glanced around for his brother, who apparently had not yet arrived. But before he had seated himself James drove up on a car which he had got at the railway station.

"Hallo," cried Ned. "Train an hour late as usual, I suppose. What else could you expect on the Thirteenth—or the Fourteenth acting as the Thirteenth?"

"It was that abominable junction," said Jim. "We were there for forty minutes."

"Sit ye down at once: ye be to be starving," said Mrs. Alexander.

Jim went to his chair, looking all the time at the stranger at the table.

"This is the eldest, I suppose," said the stranger. "As nobody seems likely to be civil enough to introduce me, I'll have to do it myself. I'm your Uncle Richard from Australia. I'm sure that you often

heerd tell of your Uncle Richard. Your father would be sure to tell you sitting round the fireside on Sunday evenings, of your poor ould Uncle Richard that he was so fond of long ago.'"

Jim looked at his father and then at his mother, as if enquiring from them how he was to take the babble of the old man. Should he regard him as drunk, or what?

"Shake hands with your uncle, sir. What are ye waiting for? Where's your manners?" cried his father.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I was just wondering—I don't think I saw you at the sham fight to-day," said Jim, shaking hands.

"You're right, my lad. That was because I wasn't there," replied Dick. "But your brother has been telling us such a lot about it, I'd be almost led to fancy that I was there just as much as himself. And now all that he left out I'm sure you'll supply."

"How was it I didn't meet you there?" asked Ned of his brother. "How did you get to the field? By the brae?"

"Isn't the brae the nearest way from the station?" said James.

"Of course it is. If I'd felt sure that you were coming by the brae I wouldn't have come by the lony."

"What lony is that?" asked Mr. Alexander.

"McCormick's Lony, of course," replied Ned. "That's the short cut from our side."

"A nice bungle the two of yiz made this day, both of ye missing other, and Ned not letting hisself be seen by anybody. Did you get a chance of a word

with Lord Innisfallen to tell him that I was sorry I couldn't go the day ? "

He had turned to his elder son, who made a little uncertain pause before replying that he had no chance of getting near anybody, there was such a crowd.

" Was there ever an explanation like yon heard : he couldn't get nigh anyone because there was a crowd ? " cried the father.

" Sure, everybody knows what he meant," said Mrs. Alexander. " He means that he couldn't get nigh till anybody he wanted to speak till on account of the throng. Isn't it always that way ?—I'll leave it till yourself."

Then began the usual family wrangle over the question of whether the fact of a son's bearing a message to some particular person who was in the centre of a crowd, should not impel him to render himself obnoxious to as many people as stood between him and the object of his search.

" Hadn't ye elbows of your own ? " enquired the elder James of the younger. " D'ye expect to go to Orange Demonstrations in kid gloves ? You might just as well have stayed at home, the pair of yiz, for all the good ye did me."

" Ay, or ourselves for that matter," said Ned, with a laugh. " I don't suppose that we got much good out of the excursion for ourselves. Did you get anything to eat, Jim ? "

" I got a bite at the station refreshment-room," growled Jim.

" That counts as a minus so far as a meal is concerned," said Ned ; " aren't those sandwiches on your chest this minute ? As for me, I got neither bite

nor sup at Scarva or Scarvafield this day, and yet here we are abused like pickpockets because we didn't elbow our way through a thousand people in order to be snubbed by Lord Innisfallen when we had delivered our message. That's just a bit too bad, I think."

"No matter what you think. Who the devil cares what you think?" cried his father.

"Nobody here does, so much is sure," said Ned glibly. "But that doesn't matter, you see, because I don't care what anybody here thinks; so there you are, you see."

"Is that anyway to talk to your father, you young pup?" said Mr. Alexander; but he did not raise his voice to any point of indignation, and he had allowed an interval of several seconds to elapse before speaking, after his son had said his say.

"Will some unprejudiced person answer him?" said Ned. "I'm afraid that I am too strongly biassed on one side to be able to make any reply that would be likely to satisfy him."

"I'd see him hanged before I'd reply to him so long as he addresses you as a pup, or even a whelp," said Uncle Richard. "It's behind the times that y'are, James Alexander, to suppose that you'll get any respect from them boys of yours, so long as you don't give them any respect."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Ned, and his father turned and glared at him.

"Don't go on for to anger him, Ned," said his mother. "What for do you badger the boys for night after night?" she asked of her husband. "You disremember that the both of them is grown up. You'll be crule sorry if you turn them again ye, so

you will, and you're going the right way about it, so you are."

"Don't let them give me any back talk, then," said he; but he had reached the growling stage, and that was his last effort—and it was a very feeble one—to occupy the leading place in the controversy.

But Helen, sitting there a silent observer of the usual evening bickering, was crying in her heart, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

The house was becoming odious to her. Every time she sat down to the table she was set wondering if Willie Kinghan had noticed a terrible contrast between the *ménage* at this house and that at the Thorntons', where she was convinced he had gone the previous evening, after their long talk in the rose garden. Her heart might well have sunk within her at the likelihood of his never returning to Ardreagh; but it did not: she belonged to a race that refuse to be beaten when they set themselves about accomplishing something. Stubborn, unmalleable, full of belief in themselves, the Ulster people, who were her people, do not become despondent in any circumstance. That is how an Ulsterman held Ladysmith in spite of the order of his commander-in-chief; that is how Lord Dufferin brought the Turk within measurable distance of reason during the most inflammable year that Constantinople, the powder magazine of Europe, has ever known; that was how the legations at Pekin were defended by Sir Robert Hart in 1901; that was how Kelvin worked in Glasgow and MacCormac in London. The spirit of Ulster was in their blood and in their bones; and it was the same spirit that prevented poor Helen Alexander from becoming

despondent while she thought of Willie Kinghan going from the bickering of Ardreagh to the tranquillity of Lisnabreen.

It was late that night, when Ned was smoking a surreptitious cigar at the bottom of the garden, that he came upon his brother sitting upon a seat in the most secluded place, with a cigarette in his mouth. It was not the lighted end of the cigarette that drew Ned in his direction, for he smoked holding his hand over the lighted end, lest it should be seen from a window of the house—it was quite by accident that Ned discovered him, and got a start in doing so.

"Hallo!" cried the younger. "Who would have thought of coming across you here? I fancied that you were done up by your long and dreary day, that you had gone to your bed."

"I wasn't so done up," said Jim. "Are you? I'm wondering how it was that no one heard the clatter of that machine of yours at Scarvafield to-day."

"What makes you wonder that? You know as well as I do that the thing is absolutely silent—to anyone a mile or so away. And what chance would its voice have against the drums of Scarvafield? It's the most convenient machine that could be imagined. The only thing about it is, that when it's loudest it puts me too much in mind of our tea-table at home."

"Convenient? Do you know what Helen is saying?"

"I haven't the least idea: about what?"

"About you and your convenient machine?"

"Oh; and what is she saying, and why should she say it to you?"

"She's saying that you didn't go to the sham fight to-day at all."

"Really? And what did you say in reply?"

"What could I say? I had told them that I hadn't seen you there."

"And she inferred that that was because I wasn't there?"

"Not altogether. She knew all about that convenient breakdown of yours on Saturday, and she fancied that it might be equally accommodating to-day."

"Clever girl! She can put two and two together, and work out the result to be—love-making. I don't think she should make these calculations—a girl should suspect nothing. But don't you think that she might just as well say to herself, 'Jim didn't see Ned at Scarva to-day because Jim wasn't there,' as 'Jim didn't see Ned because Ned wasn't there'?"

"That's rot. She knew that I haven't a convenient machine. Look here, Ned; were you there or were you not?"

"Look here, Jim; were you there or were you not, eh?"

Jim flung away the half of his cigarette.

"Good night," he said, after they had stood in silence facing one another for nearly a minute. "Good night. You do talk rot sometimes."

"Good night. Anything stirring at Lisburn to-day beyond the usual noise and Orange arches?"

Jim had taken half a dozen steps away. He gave a startled turn, but still failed to face his brother directly, and a silent minute passed before he said:

"What are you talking about anyway? Lisburn? What have you to say about Lisburn?"

"I have nothing to say or to do about Lisburn—now. What had you to say or to do with it to-day?"

"Who said I was at Lisburn?"

"Not me. I only asked if anything was stirring there. I like Lisburn. I wish to goodness we had such a town handy."

"Look here. Somebody has been putting lies into your head."

"No one, I give you my word."

"Then what do you mean by these hints about Lisburn?"

"Hints are worth exactly what one accepts them for. That's not quite plain, but it should be enough."

"You're a silly young ass—that's what you are. Good night."

"Good night again. And the next time that you go to Lisburn on a day when the trains are so thronged that the man hasn't time to collect all the tickets, don't you leave your return half lying about. There has been enough lying about that house of ours to-day to last us for a long time."

Another long pause took place before Jim said in a low voice, but one that was not wholly without a surly tone:

"What did you do with the return half?"

"What should a dutiful son like me do with it except give it to my father and tell him that I found it on the mat outside your room?"

"Damnation! You never did that."

"Of course I didn't. You're not a bad sort of chap, Jim, and you know jolly well that I wouldn't

give you away to the governor. But if you have your little affairs that you'd like kept secret, you should let off such chaps as me a bit easier than you do. You may keep your Lisburn secret; but for goodness' sake don't go on giving me advice about the Power connection. You've done so three or four times within the past week and I'm about fed up on it."

Jim once more walked away half a dozen steps in silence, and once more he turned quickly to his brother.

"Who is this Uncle Richard?" he asked.

"Who? Well, I suppose he's neither more nor less than Uncle Richard," replied Ned.

"I've heard tell of a Richard Alexander long ago, but I understood that he was dead," said Jim. "I don't know when or how I got the impression that—that—I forget just what it was; but anyhow it was something nasty about the governor and him."

"I had just the same notion when I came in upon him at the Powers' to-day," said Ned coolly; "but it wasn't until we were at dinner that I remembered that I had blackened Bob Bates's eyes because he let on that his father or somebody had said in his hearing that there had been two brothers Alexander and that they were a pair of rascals. I must have taken it for granted that the description applied to father and a brother whom I had not seen. Infernal bit of cheek on my part, wasn't it?"

"They're not rascals now anyway," said Jim stoutly.

"No: they've got on in the world. Uncle Richard told me that he had done well for himself," remarked Ned.

"I'm glad to hear that. But can we believe him?"

"I can, for my part, seeing how the governor made him welcome. He arrived late last night."

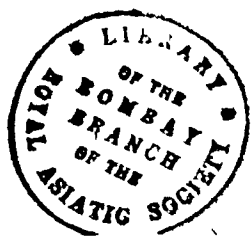
"Ah, that was how it was I thought I heard voices on the terrace after I had turned in."

"No doubt. Your window is just above where the governor had his wicker chair. What a pity it did not occur to you to raise the sash and put your ear to the opening; you would have heard every word and I'm sure that you would have heard something interesting."

"I wonder what has brought the man back to these parts."

"You would have heard that, I'm sure, if you had had self-possession enough to raise your window an inch or two. Lord! what an opportunity you have wasted! If I was in one of your lecturing moods I could give it to you hot for your thoughtlessness. You see it's not only yourself that you've cheated out of something spicy; you have left us groping too. Well, never mind; it can't be helped now. Maybe they'll give you another chance some of these nights. Hallo! that's a drop of rain. I looked for it. It's a long time since we had three fine days."

They went into the house together without another word.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CHAPTER XIX

IN Belfast there is very little fusing of Protestants and Romanists among what may be termed the "better classes," the fact being that it is understood that when one names the word Catholic, one alludes to a class definitely and distinctly inferior to the "better classes." Really it may be said that in Belfast the word "better" in qualifying a class of the population is regarded as synonymous with the word Protestant. There are, of course, better-class Catholics; but the best of these form a class that is regarded on all sides—even by the Romanists themselves—as a good way below, in the social scale, those Protestants who may aspire to, but are never allowed to be included among the lesser grades of the "better classes." There are hundreds—nay, thousands—of "better-class" people in Belfast who have never in the course of their life exchanged a word with a Catholic and a Home Ruler. There are several large Romanist churches in the city, and all are crowded with devout worshippers, but among no congregation may be found more than three or four—never as many as six—persons who are of higher social rank than that of the small shopkeeper. Some years ago there was not even one large shopkeeper who was a Romanist. For two centuries and more—since this city of nearly four hundred thousand inhabitants was a village of thatched cabins

—the Romanists have been the hewers of wood and the drawers of water among the population; but during recent times, this definition of the industrial level should not be taken too literally, the fact being that the public-houses are nearly all in the hands of Catholics, so that they draw more than water. There has been a universal lowering of qualifications of justices of the peace in all parts of Ireland, as well as of England, within the past twenty years, consequently there is no difficulty in maintaining a moderately fair proportion of the two religions on the Bench; but previously the Catholic magistrates were of a social standing infinitely inferior to that of even the humblest of the Protestants.

And in no part of the world, except Ulster, is it possible to notice a marked difference in the appearance of the two faiths. It is not a matter of dress, nor is it a matter of strongly marked racial idiosyncrasies; but almost every Protestant Ulsterman, if he is asked to pick out three Catholics from a crowd of three hundred persons, will succeed in doing so at a first attempt, provided that the three are natives of the province also. When it comes to English Catholics, the instinct of a Protestant Ulsterman is at fault.

But in all ranks in the social scale in Belfast, the most artistic of the people are the Catholics. That is, of course, because they are the descendants of the Celtic inhabitants, and the Celts have invariably excelled in the arts, although few of the Irish Celts have ever occupied the highest position as exponents of any of the arts. But in Belfast they are devoted to the drama, to music, and even to literature. Possibly there is no city in the world where so few books are

read—for years there was no real bookseller to be found in any of the principal streets. The one bookseller who died a quarter of a century ago, left a modest fortune acquired by the purchase of publishers' "remainders" of cheap volumes. He never sold a current volume. He was never asked for one. In Dublin booksellers were then to be numbered by the score.

Under such remarkable social conditions as these, it was not surprising that when Mr. Harold Montgomery, a Unitarian, married during a business trip to New Orleans, a Roman Catholic girl whose mother was a Frenchwoman, hands were uplifted in amazement—feminine hands in horror. He brought his bride to Belfast, where he might have chosen a plain Protestant helpmeet if he had been so minded—"if he had not been such a fool," said some mothers—and when she arrived in Belfast she was certainly the most beautiful woman ever seen in the city. She was a girl of gold—that was the impression which she produced upon every unprejudiced person who saw her. She was dazzling. She could not be in a room for a minute without every stranger enquiring who she was and—being in Belfast—where had she come from. What on earth was such a creature doing there, people who knew the city and its people enquired. And they looked at her in amazement.

The expression of her soft blue eyes was one of child-like gaiety, and as such a spirit had never been seen in the eyes of any young woman who was native born, the circle within which she was entitled to a place were amazed. Some paid their call to her, and then refrained from any but the most formal intimacy with her. They treated her as they had treated the lodging-

house maid whom a young man in an important position had married a short time before; but the woman in this case had plainness and vulgarity on her side, and so she speedily found a congenial society in the city: her husband's influence in certain directions was too great for his mischance to be remembered against him, and his wife began to open their bazaars, for she was a Presbyterian Protestant.

But here was this exquisite little Catholic without one quality to appeal to the sympathies of such a community—not even illiteracy, made audible through the medium of the Belfast accent!

A less intelligent person would have rebelled, and perhaps been broken down in such circumstances; but Lydia Montgomery had too keen an appreciation of a humorous situation to feel with any degree of poignancy the disapproval of a linen-lapped society; she saw the fun of being ignored by the ignorant, and if she had an uncomfortable hour, she never betrayed it. She laughed at them all, and in the course of a few years she had made a *salon* of her own—but she had to make it, and people became amazed—almost scandalised, to discover that there was so much grace and refinement in the place. Her conquest was as complete as it was unique. Never had a Roman Catholic wife of a Presbyterian Protestant achieved such a success over the traditional prejudices of centuries. It was so great that the plain and the prejudiced shook their heads and lamented—in Belfast accents—the degeneration of local society.

Minna Thornton had met this charming exotic in the early years of her flowering in uncongenial soil, and had become devoted to her. Minna had then been

eighteen, and for five years their friendship had been increasing, until the time came when no week passed without their meeting, if only for a day; and scarcely a full week had passed since Willie Kinghan had been of their party at that Sunday supper, before Lydia was sitting again on the terrace at Lisnabreen with Minna idling beside her, but with her hands encased in gardening gloves: she wore gardening gloves as a knight wore his armour on an "off" day—just in case anything should turn up.

"I'm not going to be such a fool as to advise you, *chérie*," said Lydia. "I'll tell you what advice is—advice is the opinion that one asks of a friend when one has quite made up one's mind on the question."

"Yes; but that's just what I haven't done—what I can't do," said Minna rather pitifully.

"Well, if you are worth anything at all—and I think that you are—you will not be swayed in one direction more than another by any advice I may give you," said Lydia. "I like those good folk who are ready at a moment's notice to give a woman advice. They give a particular woman exactly the same advice that they would give all women similarly situated: they forget that the varieties of woman exactly coincide with the number of the female population. Essentials—you think that in regard to essentials all women are alike? Don't you believe such foolishness: every trait of a woman—every little bit of individuality, and oh, most of all, every peculiarity of a woman is an essential."

"How comforting to think so!" said Minna, with a sigh.

"Isn't it? And, moreover, let me assure you that

a woman is not less a true woman because she happens never to be the same for two days running."

"Oh, my Lydia!"

"Ah, you would like to think that this is not true; but it is all the same. Being married opens one's eyes to a number of mysteries that only marriage can reveal."

"Is marriage as mysterious as love?"

Lydia turned her blue eyes upon her friend, and gave the smile of Mona Lisa, before she said:

"My dear child, the mysteries of love are an open book compared to the mysteries of marriage. You fancy that the two sometimes go together—well, perhaps—sometimes; but I assure you that they are two separate and distinct incidents in a woman's life. A great deal of trouble comes about through failing to recognise this. But I'm not going to talk on the philosophy of sex and the tricks of nature to you. If we were entrusted with the making of the world, we should, of course, have pursued quite a different plan from the one on which it was made originally; but I'm not absolutely sure that it would work any better than the old one, if the serpent of civilisation were to creep into the garden that we should lay out to begin with."

"Well, then, if you're not going to talk philosophy and vain deceit, will you give your whole, nice heart to my troubles?"

"Have you given the whole of your own nice heart to them, *chérie?*"

"Oh, haven't I just? But one's heart is so apt to make a fool of one."

"Yours has never made a fool of you?"

"No; but it's trying hard now. No man who ever asked me to marry him gave me any trouble but Willie Kinghan."

"And do you want me to counsel you to jump at him the next time he asks you? If I were to do so, would you jump? I should hope not indeed. The girl that accepts a man because the balance has been tipped by the counsel of another woman is—is—well, she deserves her fate."

"And what will that fate be—good or bad?"

"Ah, if one could only answer that. It's wonderful how much of Shakespeare one can learn from tearing the slips off a Shakespeare calendar: you really might pose as a Shakespearian scholar after a year or two of calendars."

"But you haven't quoted anything yet."

"I'm going to—now, somebody says in *Julius Cæsar:*

> 'O that a man might know
> The end of this day's business ere it come!
> But it sufficeth that the day will end,
> And then the end is known.'

There you are! How is that for a quotation?"

> "'But it sufficeth that the *man* will come,
> And then——'"

said Minna.

"Admirable, my dear! But what about the other man? It's not the man who comes that's so important, except as a symbol—it's the other man that counts—the man who sometimes doesn't come. Now where's the other man with you?"

"God knows. As you have been quoting Shakespeare, I will not quote Tennyson—least of all Tenny-

son in his youth, when he wrote about Mariana in her moated grange and the man who cometh not."

"You don't need to quote, Minna. Every woman is at times a Mariana and lives in a little moated grange of her own. But do you just now say, 'He cometh not'? Look there, and try if you can say it."

She spoke in a whisper, pointing to a figure walking somewhat pensively across the little bridge spanning the Ulster "burn" that made such a picturesque feature of the grounds of Lisnabreen.

"The stupid man! He caught sight of me on the terrace and he does not give me credit for sufficient tact to know when to clear off—that's why he is walking so slowly. Ah, he is an Ulsterman: he 'travels canny.' But I like him immensely: he is sure to make a name for himself. With such a man any girl might meet her enemy in the gate without misgiving."

"Please do not say anything more of good about him, or I shall hate the sight of him; or anything bad, or you'll turn me in his favour, and that will be worse for him."

Lydia turned upon her, laughing frankly.

"You poor dear!" she cried. "I know exactly how you feel. God direct you. When a girl is in your condition she stands in sorest need of Divine guidance."

A few minutes later, Willie Kinghan having passed over the bridge and got lost to sight among the great rhododendron plantation, emerged at the nearer side; and now he was walking buoyantly and with rather more than a suggestion of self-confidence.

He greeted the pair on the terrace from below, as though he had become aware of their presence there

for the first time. He would not have them imagine that his pensive face on the bridge was due to his having caught sight of a second figure on the terrace when his calculations had been based upon the appearance of one only. He was a barrister, and he had no idea of relinquishing his show of confidence in his case when he was about to put it to the jury—a jury of one: he would challenge the second on the panel.

CHAPTER XX

OF course he had his chance. Lydia Montgomery took very good care not to wait to be challenged by him. But she would not do anything so horrid or so disconcerting to her friend as to make an early and obvious flight. She did not suggest taking a solitary stroll round the garden, nor did she pretend that she just remembered at that moment a question which she meant to put to the gardener. The menace of an early and embarrassing return which such schemes involved, would be manifestly unfair to the suitor. So she allowed quite half an hour to pass before the striking of four by the church clock—she had been listening for it for a quarter of an hour and was beginning to fear that the thing had stopped—brought her to her feet with an exclamation. Four o'clock! surely not! good gracious! and she had promised to be at home to give Lady Mercer tea at half-past!

"If we are brought up for furious driving, you will have to get us off, Mr. Kinghan," she cried. "Good-bye, *chérie*; good-bye, Mr. Kinghan. Oh, maybe I can give you a lift. No?"

"So many thanks, but I am going in the other direction," he said. She was off in a second, leaving him complacent in the belief that whatever Minna might suspect, Mrs. Montgomery at least was innocent of any suspicion of the cause for his pensive mood at the bridge

"Come down and have a stroll with me by the burn, Minna," he said when Lydia had gone and they had exchanged the inevitable remarks that are passed upon a person who has just gone.

"I shall be delighted. I need not get a hat. Tea will be ready in half an hour," said she; and quite briskly she sprang from her garden chair and plucking the dead blooms from the geraniums in the formal beds of the terrace, chatting on garden matters all the time, she went down the broad and shallow steps.

But he spoke never a word until they had come to the miniature glen through which the burn babbled among mossy stones and bright ferns, with heather and broom growing in groups up to the summit, twenty feet above the little stream that twinkled among the green of its bed like a silver chain thrown loosely upon the velvet of a jewel tray.

"I never tire of coming here," said she. "It is lovely at all seasons—full of lovely memories; my dear mother designed it all."

"I want to—to—endow it with—with the matter for fresh memories equally lovely," said he. "I wish I could invoke the spirit of the glen to be on my side—to help me—to put the right words into my mouth—to translate into words the love that is in my heart."

He looked at her, but made no attempt to take her hand. He knew that if he was to succeed with her, he would succeed without the aid of so conventional an act. If he succeeded she would offer him her hand in sign of his success.

He looked at her. She was silent.

"Do you remember how long ago it was that you told me that I might come to you again?" he asked.

"You were not certain of yourself then—you said so; you were surprised—startled—I understood you: we had been such good friends for so long, you failed to see that the friendship might blossom into love."

"Ah, does it ever—does it ever, Willie?" she asked, and there were tears in her voice—a sob when she spoke his name.

"It did with me," he replied. "Why should it not be the natural course of things? What is love but the sublimest sense of friendship?"

"I think it is something quite different. God knows which is best for a man and woman—friendship or love. I think sometimes that I love friendship and hate love. Oh, I don't know anything about it. I detest myself because I cannot bring myself to think of you except as I have always thought of you. I have tried—indeed I have tried, but I have not succeeded in getting any nearer to you—oh, why should we not continue to be the good friends that we have always been? Is there any better—nobler—higher relationship? I want no other."

"This is the penalty that friendship exacts from those who indulge in it! Good Heaven! they talk of the jealousy of love; but it is as nothing compared with the jealousy of friendship, and the one thing which it would seem that friendship will never tolerate is love."

He spoke with bitterness, as if to himself, not looking at her: he actually walked some steps away from her while speaking. He did not see the little movement which she made toward him—a little movement that might have told him that at a touch she would yield. She did make such a little motion toward him; but

before it had really more than suggested itself—the very moment when she seemed to become conscious of something trembling in the balance, as it were, she started back, and a sound that suggested a little cry of dismay came from her. It suggested to the man that she had a touch of pain: but it did not cause him to turn round. He was in love with her, and he had something of the brutality of the unsatisfied lover about him. He would have been ready to die for her, but—let her feel pain. It was the horrid thought of a detestable moment; but the only thought possible at that moment. Let her feel pain; feeling pain might bring her closer to love. Had his experience led him to associate love with anything else?

But in another moment he was at her feet, so to speak. He was ready to grovel before her, asking for forgiveness for such a thought.

"Dearest, I know what is in your mind, and I know that I have distressed you. Forgive me, Minna, forgive me," he cried. "God forbid that I should go further than I have gone. If love has not come, it will not come for much pleading. I seem to hear a jeering voice urging me, 'Cry aloud; for he is a god; peradventure . . . he sleepeth and must be awaked.' But I am not a fool. If the god that answereth by fire has not touched you with his sacred fire, he will not come though I should cut myself with knives, after the manner of the priests of Baal. But don't fancy that I go away from you now without hope. You have been true—true to yourself in giving me to understand what is the truth."

"Have I? have I? I don't know," she said almost piteously. "I feel that I have done you a great

wrong; but I cannot—I cannot—I dare not. Oh, Willie, for God's sake—for Love's sake, leave me now. I am afraid of myself. I may do you a terrible wrong. I may hate you for staying to tempt me to do you this wrong. Give me a chance of loving you—give me a chance of loving you."

"Good-bye," he said the moment that she had spoken. "Good-bye, Minna; I understand you. If I did not love you as I do, I don't think that I could understand you. Good-bye!"

He put his arm about her and held her to him for a moment—she suffered him, and bent her head giving him her forehead to kiss. He put his lips to it for a moment, then turned about and walked away. Half a dozen steps were sufficient to hide him behind the great screen of rhododendrons.

And the burn babbled through the little glen at the feet of the girl who sat among the greenery of the mound for the next hour, thinking her thoughts: they were as confused as the tinkling of the stream that came from the heaven and lost itself in the ocean.

She had had a long morning's talk with her friend Lydia, upon such points as her foreboding of the coming of Willie Kinghan suggested to her; but all their talk had led her nowhither. It had not made more easy to her the meeting with the man who she knew was in love with her; it had not made her detest herself the less because she could not give him the answer for which he had come—the answer which she really wished to give him.

The counsel which she had taken with Lydia Montgomery had not sent her out with the man with her mind more fully made up than it had been before as to

what answer she should give him. Her answer was in the balance—a touch either way would, she felt sure, have affected the issue. She had never known any trait possessed by Willie Kinghan that she did not care for. He had shown himself to be a good son to his father and a good friend to her father and herself. He had won the trivial distinctions offered by the University, and some less easy to acquire in the profession he had chosen. He had been distinctly successful so far, and she was a woman who had a great admiration for success—there are some women who regard success as the greatest of the virtues, but she was not one of them; still it made its appeal to her. He was a man to whom any father of judgment would have been glad to see his daughter married. And yet when he had come to Minna Thornton the previous autumn, asking her to marry him, she had found herself unable to accept him. She did not love any other man, but she was startled, almost shocked, by his proposing to her. Their friendship and long association had brought them too near of kin to allow of her grasping all at once this idea of marriage which he had sprung upon her. It had really seemed to her almost absurd. An intimate friend like this was not at all the sort of person whom she had associated with the idea of marriage whenever she had given some attention to the personnel of the lover whom she looked for, as all healthy girls do in their spare time.

She had flushed crimson when he told her what were his aspirations, and she checked herself just in time when she was about to exclaim, "How absurd!" and was able to be at least courteous in her attempt to make him realise what was in her mind in respect

of his proposal; and he had shown himself properly appreciative of her surprise—of her reason for feeling surprise. He left her, he said, to get accustomed to the idea: he would be content to wait as long as she pleased to keep him waiting; but he hoped that she would not make exclusion from her company one of the conditions of his waiting.

She had jumped at the concession. Not for worlds would she sacrifice the enjoyment she always had in his company, she assured him; and in consequence their friendship—that friendship which he should have known was fatal to the love he longed for—became closer than ever. She was even led to cherish it all the more closely after an incident occurred which might have told her that his waiting for her was all in vain. A young woman is never so nice to a man as when she has discovered that she cannot marry him.

But had she actually made such a discovery?

Something had occurred which she had kept secret even from Lydia Montgomery—nay, which she had tried to keep secret even from herself; and she thought that she had been quite successful in doing so: she really had almost concealed the thing from herself; and it might have remained hidden for goodness knows how long, had the revelation of its reality not come upon her with overwhelming force when she found herself standing by Willie Kinghan above the silvery burn. Then that stern reality had made her assured of its presence, and its presence was so overpowering that it had made the man beside her and the offer of his love seem so trivial in her eyes as to be unworthy of a moment's consideration. She knew at that

moment that Willie had no chance; and that knowledge made her so considerate to him—so kind as to induce her to give her face to his lips.

She did not return to the house until a full hour had passed. She walked slowly up the little track through the glen until she came to a place that had always been a favourite thinking-place with her—a tiny gorge among the rocks—a place of heather and broom, pervaded with a constant murmur of bees as of a scent, that was a great help to thought. Here she threw herself down, and hidden from all the world, allowed her tears to flow without restraint.

She was angry with herself.

"A weak fool! Oh, such a weak fool!" was the accusation that was ringing in her ears. "I thought I could bring myself to say 'yes,' and by saying it put everything else behind me—under my feet for ever, and I knew that in that direction lay all happiness—*his* happiness—*my* happiness—but I was too weak—I allowed myself to be carried away by that—that—that dream—for it was a dream, and it can never be anything else, although it seemed so great—so overwhelming a few minutes ago. Oh, a weak fool!"

A hundred hurrying thoughts came through her mind, jostling one another like merry imps, some upbraiding her and others making fun of her, some ironic, others passionate, but all doing their best to humiliate her. She hated herself for having allowed herself to be terrorised by that revelation. She had a contempt for herself such as a man has for himself when he has been foolish enough to pay tribute to a blackmailer. And so she wept among the innumerable murmurous bees of the heather and the broom.

And then all in a moment—as suddenly as if she had awakened from a disquieting dream that had been responsible for her confused imaginings and self-upbraiding—she became calm. She got upon her feet and stood musing, with her eyes, still bright from her tears, looking away to where the grey clouds, shot through with the gold of the westering sun, were lying upon the soft outlines of the low hills. One of her hands was clenched upon her tear-damped handkerchief, the other was pressed against her bosom. It was an exquisite pose, beautiful in every line—a womanly pose, gracious, appealing in sympathy with the appeal of the landscape that held her as a jewel is held in its setting.

And as she made her appeal, her head, which had been somewhat bent, became straighter, until, in the course of a few minutes, it was thrown back, changing the effect of her attitude into one of firmness—of determination.

She did not differ greatly from most women who assume an attitude of resolution, hoping that they will become resolute in consequence; and—also like most women—she believed that a desire to be firm was the same thing as being firm.

CHAPTER XXI

CERTAINLY there was no faltering in her feet as she walked through the emerald dell into the house and upstairs to her bedroom. She looked at herself in the glass for some moments. There were no signs in her eyes of her recent tears, but her hair—she picked up a brush and touched it where it had become a little tossed. She would not have a hair out of its place at that moment, so anxious was she to convince herself that she was herself again, free from all mental disturbance—sane, above all things sane, ready to act in accordance with the resolution she had made no longer to pay the exorbitant demands made upon her by her dreams. A woman who can look after her hair at a critical period is one who knows that the crisis is past and that she has come through it untouched.

She went through the door leading to her boudoir—a charming room created for her by Lydia under the inspiration of Boucher and a plaque of Rose du Barry Sèvres.

"You shall never enter that room without thinking of me," was the spell laid upon her by Lydia at its creation—but she was not thinking of Lydia when she sat down to the little escritoire—a dainty thing of ormolu masks and escutcheons—and with firm fingers wrote:

"My dear Willie,

"I believe that I am in my senses now. Before I must have been flighty. I do not see any reason why I should not say *yes* to your proposal. I say it now—yes—yes—yes. Forget that I ever said—but I never did say *no*—now did I? What I said was, *not yet*.

"Believe me your

"Minna."

She put the letter into a cover and laughed.

"Who has got the best of it now?" was the expression on her face as she gave a challenging glance at the little mirror held up to her by half a dozen little golden cupids. "Who has got the best of it now?"

She felt that she had conquered that past fit of weakness which had allowed a single incident to warp her judgment—her self-respect—her worship of the Sane; and so she could, with a sigh of relief—in the circumstances her sigh must have been one of relief—throw herself down among the cushions of her couch, with a volume of eighteenth-century lyrics conceived in that spirit of graceful cynicism which Heinrich Heine drank as a liqueur and then breathed into every verse that he wrote. But the volume was not by Heine; it was by several French jinglers, and there was a shrug in every line.

She felt greatly amused until it was time to dress for dinner. . . .

Barely in keeping with the humour of the raised eyebrows and the expressive shrug was the story which

her father brought to her from the village; but there was still something to laugh at in it, she thought, and she gave herself up to the laughter it provoked.

It appeared that a Roman Catholic of the hills had died a few days before and had been "waked" in a manner that was regarded as quite adequate to the occasion and the social standing of the deceased. And whatever whisky had been overlooked at the wake—the oversight could not be accounted for by Colonel Thornton or any of the other magistrates on the Bench—had been consumed after the funeral; and among those who benefited by the neglect was Jerry O'Donnell, a well-known official of the Order of Hibernians, consequently a rabid Papist, who considered the forty shillings and costs which he was now and again fined for making use of party expressions, well-spent money. Well, Jerry had put on the black coat and the stove-pipe hat that his father had worn before him upon equally grave festivities, and had attended the funeral fête on the Sunday evening, remaining with the bereaved relations until past midnight. He had then set out to walk to his home, four miles away, but it appeared that he had changed his mind when close to Arderry, and had determined to enjoy a short rest before completing his journey; for when Alick Ferguson, the engine-man at Alexander's mill, was on his way to his duty at five in the morning, he spied Jerry lying comfortably asleep in a dry "sheugh," with his black coat folded neatly under his head for a pillow, and his tall black hat standing solemnly on the roadside. Now what did that rascal of an Orangeman, Alick Ferguson, do but take away the hat to the Liddells' garden and dig up a

big orange lily in full bloom and plant it in the hat with all the earth clinging about the roots and as much as the hat would hold up to the very brim, and place it beside the slumbering Jerry, cautiously coaxing one of his arms to encircle it, and there he left him for all the mill hands to admire as they came to their work, and it seemed that a good many availed themselves of the opportunity so kindly offered them; but one of them, who had bought a second-hand kodak the week before, ran back to his home for it, and snapshotted the leader of the Hibernians in the act of embracing an unmistakable orange lily, growing luxuriantly out of what looked like a black tub with a most unusual rim, and the photographer promised to send copies to every Orange Lodge in Ulster.

The jest had been yelled at over a thousand spindles, and poor Jerry had been unable to show himself in the street without some enquiry as to how his orange lily was doing, or whether he was on his way to the Orange Lodge, or if it was true that he had been "summonsed" by the police for cursing the Pope. Of course, in another week the joke would have died a natural death; but Jerry was ill-advised enough to "summons" Alick Ferguson to recover the amount of damage done to his hat, and Colonel Thornton had been on the Bench when the case was dismissed, for no one could prove that the culprit was Alick, and so Jerry left the court to be greeted by cries of "Bully Jerry!" "Give us a bunch for the arch, Jerry." "Is it true that ye're practysin' 'Boyne Water' again the next Hibernian persession?" He was also strongly advised by amateur horticulturists to irrigate his orange lily with holy water if he wanted it to do really well; and

the police had to drive off his tormentors before the horn sounded at the conclusion of the dinner hour.

Minna laughed heartily at the story! She could do so now, seeing that she had nothing on her mind. She had done all that she had been angry with herself for not doing when the chance had been offered her; she had returned to the sanity of reality from the dreamland through which she had been wandering, and so she could laugh in hearty enjoyment of the broad practical jest. Her father found her in better spirits than he thought she had enjoyed for a long time, and she went to her white bed with a light heart.

She awoke with a start in the middle of the night—a start and the sense of someone being in the room with her—close to her bed—good God!—he was about to get into her bed!

She sprang up with a cry and switched on her light, at the same instant snatching up a heavy old brass candlestick for her defence.

She could see no one. She was alone in the room. She tried both doors; the wardrobe also was locked. She laid down the candlestick and dropped into a chair, limp, but burning—overwhelmed with a sense of shame that amounted to horror. She lay back and closed her eyes. Her heart was throbbing so violently that it made the table which her shoulder was just touching, quiver, and the glass inverted over the mouth of her carafe tinkle.

It was a dream that she had had—such a dream! She thought that she had married, not Willie Kinghan, but someone else, and it was their wedding night. Carried away in her ecstasy of love and the mystery

of her passion, she had felt in another world—in the maiden's paradise of anticipation—when the door opened and there entered, not the man for whom she was waiting, but Willie Kinghan!

And that was the horror which had aroused her and sent her flying across the room in search of light and a weapon for her defence.

She sat there with her head in the hollow of her hooded chair, and her eyes closed, until her heart began to beat less violently; but nearly an hour had passed before the fever of her dream had moderated; and she opened her eyes.

She got up from the chair and a curious impulse sent her to a window, and she looked out strangely, as if she expected to see someone on the terrace below. The night was one of light still clouds, saturated with moonlight, though the moon, now in its last quarter, was invisible, and she could easily have seen anyone had anyone been there. She saw the outline of the garden beds, and far away the little chain of mountains that she knew was the rhododendron shrubbery; the white fleece of the little burn was as conspicuous among its mosses and ferns as a white tacking cotton threading a black velvet robe. That was all she saw. No one had come near the house.

But what had she looked for? Whom had she looked for under the impulse of that dream-sense?

She could not go to bed. She felt like the maiden on her wedding night. She walked to and fro upon her carpet for nearly an hour, and when she stopped suddenly, it was not because the fit had left her, but because she had walked up against what she described to Lydia the next day as a dead wall of thought.

She had written that letter which was lying on her desk in the next room waiting to be posted—she had written it promising to become the wife, not of the man whose coming she had awaited in the ecstasy of her dream, but the man against whose intrusion she had armed herself and was prepared to defend herself to the death!

She stood there breathless in the middle of the room distracted with the horror of the thought. She had written that letter certainly not lightly, but certainly without the thought of the consummation to which her vivid dream had led her. A maiden's meditation is fancy-free of such an incident as that waiting. But now Minna knew all, and stood there trembling in the realisation of the truth.

She rushed to the door of her boudoir, and without switching on the light saw the white square of the letter lying on the desk. She made a snatch at it, as though it were in the hand of someone who had no right to read it, and tried to tear it across in its cover. But her writing-paper was too tough. She twisted at it and crumpled it and strained the joints of her fingers. In the passion that was upon her at the moment she caught it in her little teeth, and so made a perforation close to the edge, by the aid of which the paper was easily torn in two—in four—in twenty—a hundred pieces, and then, womanlike, she put the little bits in a heap in the grate, and set fire to them.

"Thank God! Thank God!" she said out loud, and returning to the next room, jumped into bed, pulled the coverlet up to her chin, and was asleep in five minutes.

CHAPTER XXII

BUT in spite of quite a comfortable sleep of some hours, she awoke with a sense of having to face something that she would rather have turned her back upon. She felt that the burning of the letter which she had written to Willie Kinghan was only a symbol of an emotion which had produced a very vivid impression upon her at the time; but an hour of strong sunlight in the morning brought back to her some of the remorse she had felt in the little glen after she had sent away the man who had offered himself to her.

She knew that what she wanted was someone in whom she could confide the secret that she had been cherishing in silence. To most women a secret behaves as did the sharp-toothed young fox to the Spartan boy; but sometimes they do not bear the agony of its company with the same composure. That is why the confessional is invariably crowded with women. It is better to confess one's sins than not to confess anything; and it is easy imparting to an ordinary act of life the complexion of a sin to give a relish to the confession of it. Thus it is that so many confidences which women exchange with women pass for confessions, and afford great relief to the soul that has unburdened herself of them.

Minna Thornton had never felt the need of a con-

fidante until now, but she did feel the need of one very badly now—so very badly that she was at the telephone talking to her friend Lydia before either she or her friend had sat down to breakfast.

"I want to be with you, Lydia," she said to the receiver. "I must be with you. Will you come to me or shall I go to you?"

"Is it really so bad as all that?" came the muffled enquiry of Lydia.

"As bad?—oh, worse—worse!"

"Then you will have to come to me, for I cannot leave home to-day. Harold is bringing someone here from Belfast, but he does not say whether for lunch or tea or dinner, so I must stay to await developments. On the whole, don't you think that my position is worse than yours—whatever yours may be?"

"I shall be with you at eleven—if that will suit you."

"Could not be better. Mind you don't tell me more than you need—or less."

"You shall be the judge. *Au revoir.*"

And before the clock had struck eleven, she was sitting in the little room which Lydia had appropriated at the top of her house, the southern windows of which overlooked the green waters of Lough Neagh.

"Now mind, my Minna dear, you are like the prisoner who has just been arrested," cried Mrs. Montgomery. "You need not say anything; but whatever you say will be brought up against you."

"I shall tell you all—no more than all, but no less," said Minna.

"But is there any need to tell me anything?"

"No need whatever, except that I should die if I had not you to confide in. Ah, that is what makes

the Church of Rome the Church for women: there is always a confidant at the other side of the confessional."

"For Heaven's sake, hush! I implore of you to say such things in a whisper. I have no desire to have hundreds of fingers pointed at me amid the hisses of the awful word 'proselytiser!' by a thousand indignant voices."

"You shall never hear one—only one voice will you hear, and that is mine, telling you my story. *Peccavi*, I have transgressed all the convenances, but believe me, I have done the maximum of penance in advance."

"You speak as a heretic. Let me tell you that penance and repentance are, according to the dicta of our Church, the same thing. You talk glibly of penance in advance. But have you repented in advance, my daughter? Alas, not in advance—you have not repented at all. You do not repent even now—unless you have repented coming to me."

"I will not have you mock at serious things, Lydia. Oh, listen to me, and then say what you will. Indeed it is serious with me just now."

"My poor dear. I know how serious it is. You had your chat with Willie Kinghan yesterday. You sent him away unsatisfied, and now—are you sorry for it—for him? Of course you are. He is a nice man and a true man, and you are sorry for him because you like him so well. Now haven't I saved you a great deal of trouble? All that now remains for you to confide is represented by a note of interrogation."

"Meaning why?"

"No, not why—*who—who—Who.*"

"Ah, you have got to the depth of my secret, as I knew you would. I cannot tell you who; it is enough for me to tell you that he exists—that by my foolishness I have given him power over me—power to come between any other man and myself."

"That would sound serious to anyone who did not know you as I know you, Minna dear."

"What does that matter? Do you suppose that I would confide in anyone except you? Have I been unwomanly, or only too womanly, in falling in love with a man whom I have met only three times, and who has never given me the slightest hint that he has ever had a second thought about me?"

"That is serious indeed. If you were any other than the girl you are, I should say you had been foolish, and advise you to forget all about that obtrusive person, by remembering how good is the one who told you yesterday, for the second time, that he loved you and who has been loving you truly for years."

Minna started up from the little sofa on which she had been sitting. She looked at Lydia for a few moments, and then walked to the window and stared out over the green waters of the lough.

Lydia said nothing. She waited.

But a long time had passed in silence before Minna turned round from the window.

"Listen to me," she said resolutely. "I have not made a parade of coming here to ask your advice. I mean to take your advice. I am in such a way just now that if you tell me I should accept Willie, I will accept him. I promise you that: I shall accept him."

"For God's sake, do not say that to me."

"I have said it, and I shall abide by it. I sent him away before five o'clock last evening, and before seven I had written him a letter taking back my refusal of him and promising to marry him."

"Mercy on us! And yet you are here?"

"I am here because at four o'clock this morning I tore that letter into a hundred pieces and set them on fire and burnt them to ashes."

"Oh!"

Once more there was a long silence. The two stood looking at each other, but without a word; and the expression in the eyes of both was that of duellists who have their blades crossed, each awaiting the next move of his antagonist.

But after a minute of strain, Lydia drew back her weapon; the look in her eyes changed strangely, and she said in a voice that was low and full of feeling:

"What had happened to make you kill that letter?"

"A dream—a horrid dream. I don't know whether it was a maidenly dream or not—I suppose some people would call it a shocking dream."

"I dare say it was shocking too: at any rate it shook your purpose. What was it? Something about the Other?"

"I cannot tell how it came to me. I had not been thinking about what marriage meant—that appalling intimacy which makes a girl blush all over her body when it suggests itself to her—about once every three or four years, it may be. No, I had been thinking of marriage in connection with Willie from the fire-

side point of view—fireside and slippers after a year or two."

"With the occasional flush of a triumphant speech in Parliament?"

"I did not even get so far. No, I had no imagination to carry me beyond the fireside and the evening paper. And I thought I went to sleep quite satisfied with the way matters had turned out; for there was that letter waiting on my desk to be posted the first thing in the morning. I don't know how long I slept, but it cannot have been very long—they say a long dream takes only a few seconds to be dreamt; but this one—I can tell you, but I dare not tell anyone else in the world; even to you, Lydia, I can only whisper it. It was the night, and I had been married in the morning—the night: I suppose a girl may without reproach have a vision of it. If not, then reproach me as I deserve; anyhow, there I was—waiting—tingling with anticipation; there was a sound at the door—he was coming—I closed my eyes in my dream and the door opened, and someone entered and approached me. Oh, horrible! It was not he—it was not the man I had married—it was another—another—and the horror of that took hold on me. I cried out, and I must have sprung from my bed at that moment, for the next that I knew I was standing in the middle of my room with the light on, and in my hand was one of the old brass candlesticks. I had a frightful sense of there being a man in the room and of my having caught the heavy candlestick to defend myself. . . . That's all—it does not sound much in the telling, but while I was in it—part of it—it was unspeakable. It was long before I became myself again."

"And your first act was to burn the letter you had written to—to—him; for it was of him you had your warning dream?"

"That is true. I saw how impossible it was—how—how revolting."

"That is the true word. Well, that is all your confession, I suppose."

"Is it not enough?"

"Oh, quite enough. You were made aware of the truth for the first time. But about the other—the husband of your vivid dream—I cannot think who——"

"You could not—oh, not if you were to guess until the end of all things. Do not make the attempt, please."

"I certainly shall not. At present I have not the remotest idea, I can assure you."

(The next time that Mrs. Montgomery entered the confessional, it may be assumed that she mentioned incidentally in the course of a catalogue of the scheduled sins of which she acknowledged herself to be guilty, the sin of having spoken a falsehood in the ear of her friend; and doubtless the penance in its expiation was cheerfully done by her.)

"How could you have any idea?" asked Minna. "Only three times, and a complete stranger!"

"What, you call the one for whom you were waiting all your life, a complete stranger?"

"I thought that you—well, you know how I have laughed at times over what I fancied was the sentimental bleatings of girls who talked in low thrilling tones about their affinities—meeting with their true affinities. I have heard one or two married women with good husbands and half a dozen children talk

about their souls' mate—it was never the husband, of course—and I always felt that they were making themselves ridiculous. I will never do so again. I tell you, Lydia, that five minutes after I had seen him I felt that he was the man I had been waiting for. Twice after that day I met him, and then he went away; I have not seen him or heard of him since, and yet I still feel—oh, the folly of it! but I cannot help it—folly or madness or stupidity, I am here waiting for him, and I shall be waiting for him when I have grown old and grey. Now, confess, my dearest love, that I have given you a surprise. Did you ever for one moment fancy that I was a girl like this?"

"Surprise? Surprise is not the word for it!" (Mrs. Montgomery had become guarded in her words. She had no mind to run up a long account to present to the amazed ear of her confessor. She could not tell another—at least not directly: there is always an emergency exit from the confessional, just as there is from the iron garage of the Hebrew ritual, allowing the devout but bereaved Jew to march into the open air after breaking a few threads in the lining of his waistcoat to do duty for the rending of his garments, and putting a pinch of powdered lavender on his head, to take the place of the dust in the old etiquette of mourning.) "No, indeed, surprise is not the word for it. Oh, Minna, taking one thing with another, this is a pitiful story you have told me, and I pity you with all——"

"Ah, now you go on too fast, Lydia. I do not ask for your pity. On the contrary, now that I have got my confession off my mind, I feel happy—positively happy. I would not have anything undone. I am

glad that I met him, for he has taught me what love is—and all without a kiss—without a single kiss!"

"That is why the tears are in your eyes: the thought of that kiss that was wanting. If only that kiss had been given, you would be quite happy, I believe, in spite of everything. The kiss is something for the maiden to gloat over—to croon over—it takes the place in the maiden's breast of the babe in the mother's. And it was denied to you."

Minna was now laughing, but very seriously: her eyes were still dim. She made no other attempt to answer her friend.

"Why was the kiss denied?" continued that friend—a confessor turned inquisitor. "Was it some foolish sense of honour or propriety on your part, or on his?"

Minna shook her head, not signifying negation, but simply ignorance: she was unable to say on whose side the fault lay—fault? Well, perhaps, it was only an oversight.

"Never mind; it is a great pity—there was no kiss, no matter who was to blame for the omission," resumed Mrs. Montgomery. "It cannot be helped now; but it should be a warning to you, Minna. I'm afraid you said something chilling just at the psychological moment."

"Not a word—not a word. I do not know anything about psychological moments. So far as I can gather, psychological moments are exactly the opposite to logical moments. No. I think—but what is the good of thinking? It is too late now—he has gone and I shall never see him again, and I shall never love anyone again so long as I live."

"And afterwards it will be too late to make a start. Ah, pardon my apparent want of sympathy, my Minna. Believe me, I am not unsympathetic; only I am one of those people who see a happy ending to every journey's end, no matter how dolorous the way may be. Dear child; I will not ask you to tell me any more of the details of this secret of yours. It may be that I know the man—or that I have met him, but I will not ask you to give me the least little end of a clue to the finding of him. I only take it for granted that he does not live in our neighbourhood or in Belfast."

"You may assume so much; but no more. You have met him, I know—that's all. Now that I have made my confession I shall go; and indeed I shall go feeling somehow less miserable than I have been for ages. What did you say about things coming right? Do these things ever come right, Lydia?—tell me that."

"I cannot tell you that! Who can say what coming right means in such a matter as this? Those foolish novel writers! They end their books in a jingle of wedding bells and 'The Voice that breathed o'er Eden,' and call that the happy ending! Alas! the Voice that breathed o'er Eden in the earliest wedding day was the same Voice that spoke the curse upon the married couple before the end of the next chapter—the wedding took place in the first. What is to be the happy ending to the story which you have just told me? Is it the man's returning to claim that kiss for which you and he were longing when some fool broke in on you to point out your name on his dance card? Or will it come with the copy of the newspaper con-

taining the announcement of his marriage to someone else? Dare you decide upon that question? I think that your Willie feels very doleful to-day; but in a few years hence he may look back upon yesterday as one of the lucky days of his life. A man once told me that the happiest hours of his life were spent looking at the girls who had refused him when he was young and they were slender. So it may be with you when——"

"No, no, no! oh, Lydia, spare me. It is funny to hear you talk of other people in this way, but it is just the opposite when you begin to talk of me in such a connection."

"To be sure it is. Love is a condition of deception from first to last. People think of unhappy marriages just as they do of death. Death is something that applies to other people exclusively; so are unhappy marriages. Every girl looks for her happiness in life to begin with marriage; alas! it most frequently ends with marriage. Now don't point at me. I am happy, but mine is an exceptional case."

"And I want mine to be an exceptional case also; but, alas!—oh, I am a fool, Lydia! Oh, was there ever such a fool as a girl who allows herself to fall in love with a man the first time they meet, and who continues to love him day and night after they have met only twice again and have parted without the word 'love' being so much as mentioned between them? Your French proverb says that to talk of love is to make love; but we never mentioned the word."

"Then all I can say is that you deserve to suffer for your omission."

"And my penance will be that I shall die without

ever being able to respond to a man who tells me that he loves me."

"Who knows if your life will not be all the happier on that account? Who knows if—oh, what does Tennyson carol on the subject?—

'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

He might have gone further, and sung that 'tis better to have loved and lost than ever to have loved at all. To cherish a passion as our ideal tends more to happiness than to have a husband sitting opposite to you at the breakfast-table telling you that the eggs are hard-boiled again. I know that my sham cynicism sounds dreadful to your ears. But it does not make any difference to your cherishing of your ideal. If I thought for a moment that it did, I should talk to you in the mawkish commonplaces of Thomas H. Caine, the novelist, who writes of love in the phrases of the successful advertisement, or of Mr.—Mr.—I forget his name, who writes through his nose as the preacher preaches in Little Bethel."

Minna looked at her sadly.

"You are most kindly at heart in proportion as you are cynical in phrases," she said. "But there is more wisdom in your fun than there is in most women at their earnest. What I feel about you is that you *know:* most women pretend to know and pretend very badly. Good-bye; I have nothing more to say to you."

"Nor have I to you, except to entreat of you to wait. But you have had your warning: you will wait."

"I will; but for what?"

"You shall know what it was you waited for when it comes—when *he* comes—not sooner. Good-bye."

Minna kissed her and went away without another word. Her friend was too wise to ask her to stay to have lunch. The confessor does not lay it on his penitent to drink tea with him on the afternoon that she leaves his box. He has already defined her penance. Lydia Montgomery knew that nothing would be gained, but on the contrary a great deal might be lost, by her staying for lunch. Minna might be tempted to mention a name that Lydia had no wish to hear—had no need to hear—and that would have been not only a confidence of supererogation, so to speak, but one also that might tend to interfere with the carrying out of her own plans as a sort of subsidiary Providence—not a supreme authority, of course, in the conduct of events; but merely that of a kind of chairman having the casting vote upon the occasion of a difference of opinion among an equally divided council.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN Minna had driven herself away from the house, Mrs. Montgomery threw off the gauze garment of cynicism out of the folds of which she had sent her voice uttering many things that sounded strange to Minna's ear. One cannot be cynical with oneself. What would be the good of " trying on " such a pose with oneself? There are women who admire the artificial length of lash imparted to their eyelids by the adventitious agency of a charcoal pencil, but Lydia Montgomery was not one of them. She had the choice of two mediums for the concealment of her real feelings: the one was frankness, the other cynicism; and she chose the latter. She perceived at once, from observing the condition in which Minna had come to her, that it would be impossible for her to say to her confiding visitor:

" My dear girl, what you are telling me is no news whatever: I saw the look there was in your eyes on that day last October when you returned from your stroll with Major Benton 'round the picturesque grounds of the Bishop's palace—I noticed also the look there was in those same eyes of yours when you came across the country to this house of mine a week later and found that this same Major Benton was to sit by your side at lunch, and I saw how those eyes were full of the light that never was on sea or land anywhere

but within the depths of the eyes of the woman who loves and is in the presence of her lover." She could not say this to her friend, nor did she believe that it would be fair to her friend to make any allusion to the tenor of Major Benton's discourse respecting the sail he had on the Lough with Miss Thornton on that evening of heavenly calm and inverted reflections of the island mounds that showed their green summits above the surface of the still waters. She would have liked to do so; but she felt that to adopt such a course would tend to defeat her own purposes as the President of the sub-committee discharging the duties of an efficient Providence in such cases as were developing under her own eyes. She came to the conclusion that, on the whole, cynicism was even a better disguise for her emotions than complete frankness would have been, and she had, she thought, rather startled her friend by some of the views she had expressed.

But now the need for such a pose was over; and as she thought of how things were working themselves out, she ran upstairs to her bower overlooking the great water, and, locking the door, flung herself down upon the cushions of her sofa and wept such tears as she had shed only once before—and that was when her Harold had told her of his love for her!

She was fonder of Minna Thornton than she had been of any girl she had ever known; and she had tried her 'prentice hand as Providence the previous year in endeavouring to bring together her dearest friend and the man whom she herself had been very near to marrying seven years before. She had known Guy Benton when he had been attached to the British

Embassy at Washington, and she had cared greatly for him at that time—almost greatly enough to allow of her marrying him. But something had prevented her from giving him the encouragement which it seemed he needed, and in the meantime Harold Montgomery had appeared, and Guy Benton had been swept out of her sight; for she had eyes only for the new-comer.

That was seven years ago; but she had never lost sight of him, and when she learned that he was the guest of Lord Ormiston in a neighbouring county, previous to going out to take up an important appointment on the staff of the Indian Viceroy, she had invited him to her house for a day and asked Minna to be of the party. That was the day that Minna had talked of—her red-letter day, when she had met him for the first time.

He had not been asked a second time; he had asked himself—and a third time. He was not a confiding man; and he did not tell his hostess that he had any *arrière pensée* beyond that of the satisfaction of a reunion with herself in wishing to come to her house; but she judged that his reticence on this point was due to his impression that she was quite capable of coming to a reasonable conclusion on such a matter for herself without the need for the exchange of a word between them.

It so happened, however, that in his mind Major Benton had no such thought. He believed that his secret was his own, when he had sailed away at the call of duty. But it gratified Lydia to think that he had given her credit for some little perception; and it was in this spirit that she had read the civil post

scriptum enquiries in his letters respecting some of the people whom he had met at her house. (He had written several letters to her from Simla and Lucknow, and, later, from Aligarh, where he had gone on certain missions.)

"Kindly remember me to those nice people," he had written. "There was a very charming Mrs. Crawford who brought her daughter in blue, as the lady journalists describe such a transaction; and there was an exquisite young woman whom you called Minna—Minna Thornton her name was: her father did some good work on the Nile—do not forget to tell her that I made enquiry after her. And was there not—but after mentioning her I do not like to add anyone else, unless with a full page between."

That had been the postscript to his first letter; and in the second he had wondered if he had asked her after a charming girl with whom he had had a sail—not quite a sail—a drift—a Miss Thornton. If not, he hereby begged leave to repair the omission, and he asked her if she did not agree with him in thinking Miss Thornton a marvellous creature. In a later letter he had asked her to tell Miss Thornton that he had not forgotten how they had drifted together, and to express to her the hope that one day they might have another such experience.

All these incidents of their correspondence Lydia stored away in her memory, taking care, in view of such a confession as Minna had just made to her, to refer to the messages only in the most casual way. Major Benton had referred to her in the group of people about whom he had very civilly enquired, she had mentioned to Minna, and had then taken care to

avert her eyes from her friend's face, that she might not fancy her little flush had been detected.

For nearly a whole year she had maintained this attitude, and now she had her reward in the form of the unrestrained confession of Minna Thornton. . . .

It took her some time composing herself after she had shed those gracious tears at the thought of "everything coming right." Alas! for her cynicism! The thought that came into her mind shaped itself into those very words. Everything was coming right, because Minna loved Guy and they were both her dearest friends.

Of course she told her husband, when he came from his business in Belfast, all about the interview she had had with Minna, and equally as a matter of course he was far from being as sanguine as she that everything was coming right. To start with, he had observed nothing noteworthy in the relative bearing of the man and the girl the previous year. He thought that Benton had been impressed by the beauty and the charm of the girl; but was not every man impressed in the same way? Had not Minna Thornton received at least three offers of marriage during the past two years? he enquired; and was it not an understood thing that Willie Kinghan was only waiting his opportunity to make the fourth? Might it not be possible that his Lydia was just a little too imaginative? . . .

But even admitting the correctness of her conclusions, what could she do, he wished to know. How could she make any move in such a matter? It was a ticklish business this marriage-mongering, and in

his experience it resulted in more mischief than good being done. But for that matter, he did not suppose that Lydia intended doing anything. What could she do? But if she did anything, he was sure that it would be right. After all, he acknowledged that she was a better judge of what constituted tact than he could pretend to be. She was not the sort of woman to be a busybody. He was not such an idiot as to caution her even in a whisper. Minna Thornton was perhaps the nicest girl in the world, and she deserved the best that the world had to offer her. He did not deny that young Kinghan had great ability or that he would get on in his profession; but he did not think that he was exactly the man for Minna. So far as that went, however, most men got much better women than they deserved—he himself was the most notable example that he could think of in this connection; and he was sure that Lydia would show herself to be an accomplished exponent of the difficult art of doing nothing in regard to Guy Benton and her friend Minna.

So the husband talked in spasms, and his Lydia showed her tact and her understanding of husbands and their ways by listening with assenting comments to his words of wisdom; but all the time she was wondering if it might not be possible for her to become an adept in postscripts as Major Benton had shown himself to be. The Indian Mail did not leave without bearing in one of its sealed bags an excellent example of her first essay in a form of composition founded upon the structural scheme of the successful dramatist, who reserves his most important situation for his last act. So far as her letter was concerned, however, it would be less vague to compare its art

with that of the maker of bombs. The bomb is quite an ordinary composition throughout, but when it is finished and the manipulator adds by way of postscript a time fuse in working order, the whole becomes operative. The postscript to Lydia Montgomery's letter was designed by her to produce some commotion in the mind of the man to whom it was addressed, and she awaited the result at a distance, but, still, not without some trepidation.

She wondered if Willie Kinghan would confide anything to her sympathetic ear. She would have been surprised if he had done so. She did not think that she had ever been looked on by him as a person in whom it was wise to confide. Mr. Kinghan was just the sort of man who would not take any step in life without asking himself if it was a wise one; and she felt certain that he had long ago come to the conclusion that it is never quite safe to confide anything to anyone, unless a lawyer, and even then one cannot be too careful. But a woman—well, he had no reason to grumble at the human tendency to pour one's confidences into the ear of a woman; for he had been provided with several briefs, the most interesting passages in which were due to the fact that a man had confided something to a woman "which he didn't ought to," and his briefs had been marked in very satisfactory figures. But while he pocketed his fees, he learned his lesson as to the risk attached to communicating to a woman that which one should keep to oneself.

To be sure there is such a thing as an exchange of confidences between a man and a woman; but his experience had taught him that at the ordinary rate

of exchange, the man's being gold and the woman's paper, the former must be appraised approximately to their face value, while the latter are nearly always some way below par, and even then should be accepted with caution.

Mrs. Montgomery thought that she was able to form a pretty accurate estimate of the character of Mr. Kinghan. He was, she thought, an excellent specimen of the best kind of Ulsterman—the kind of Ulsterman who gets on in the world by keeping to himself any information which he calculates may be useful to him at some time. She knew that the Ulsterman's motto has always been to keep himself to himself. That is why, fundamentally, he objects to be governed except by people of his own race, which is not the Irish. Mrs. Montgomery felt certain that Mr. Kinghan would think twice before giving his confidence to anyone, and then he would refrain. Ulstermen believe in getting on in the world, but they do not believe that their ends will be furthered by giving themselves away. They do not like giving anything away unless for a consideration.

No, Lydia liked Willie greatly, and she felt that he would make an excellent husband, and that he would rise to eminence in the world; but she never expected to hear him announced at any visiting hour, in order that he might impart to her his tale of loving Minna Thornton and of being, for some inexplicable reason, rejected by her.

And her judgment in this matter was not at fault. He did not pay her a visit. He went back to his work in Dublin instead, leaving her to compose dynamic postscripts to inoffensive letters to India.

CHAPTER XXIV

HELEN ALEXANDER had made (at her own instigation) a very solemn promise to Mr. Kinghan that she would keep him fully informed on all particulars bearing upon the matter that had been the subject of their conversation among the roses. She had told him how greatly troubled she was regarding her brother Edward, who, she feared, had been foolish enough to allow himself to be carried away by the fascinations of Miss Power—she made use of the word fascinations, but of course she was careful to qualify her employment of it by the confession that, for her part, she could not for the life of her see where the attractiveness of Kate Power lay. Mr. Kinghan had heard her with rather more than professional politeness, and had begged her to keep him fully informed upon this painful matter, in order that he might be able to advise her what steps, if any, should be taken to prevent such a catastrophe as his falling so deeply in love with the young woman as would make it impossible for his friends to hold him back from the consequences of his act.

Mr. Kinghan had scarcely got back to Dublin before he received a letter from Helen to let him know that she had reason to believe that Edward was putting his motor-bicycle to such an ignoble use as to bear him on almost daily visits to the Powers; and what was

worse, he was deserting his evening drills with the regiment of Ulster Volunteers that had been furnished by the neighbourhood to resist the substitution of Home Rule for the Rule of the Union. With many thousands of the best of the population of Ulster, he had signed the Ulster Covenant in Belfast, binding himself to resist Home Rule at any cost, and there had been no greater enthusiast on the subject of resistance: he had been one of the first volunteers, and for eight months he had never missed a drill; but now, his sister was pained to have to tell Mr. Kinghan, he had for several weeks past failed to put in an appearance at the evening muster, though he had pretended to the household to be as active as ever. In these circumstances, she was at a loss to know what she should do, and felt more relieved than she could tell, to know that she had a friend in Mr. Kinghan—a friend whom she trusted with all her heart to give her the best advice possible.

She feared what would be the result of her father's making the discovery of Edward's shilly-shallying: Mr. Kinghan knew how ardent an anti-Nationalist her father was, and she was sure that Mr. Kinghan would not think she was talking wildly when she assured him that if it came to her father's ears that Ned was behaving in the way he was, he would not think twice about turning her brother out of the house, and this she thought would be terrible; for Ned was her favourite brother, and she would do anything in the world to save him.

She felt so sorry to trouble Mr. Kinghan with her paltry affairs when he was, as she knew, so deeply engaged in the work which he had set himself to do for the saving of Ulster from Ulster's enemies; but what

could she do, she enquired. Her brother was very dear to her, and so was the peace of their house. She really thought that unless she had Mr. Kinghan to look to for guidance, she should be distracted. But she had him, and she found it impossible to tell him what this meant to her.

This was the first of several letters that she wrote to Mr. Kinghan during the next few weeks, and he replied to it and to all the others that he got from her, and in doing so he felt gratified (and said so) to be on such confidential terms with a girl whose devotion to the cause which he himself had at heart was so cruelly put to the test by the foolish behaviour of her brother. He most heartily hoped, he said, that she would find that the relations between Ned and Miss Power did not go beyond those of an ordinary flirtation between an impressionable young fellow and a girl who should be the last he should fall in love with. But he thought that Ned was like many other adventurous young fellows in the history of the world, from Romeo down, who were actually attracted to the one girl whom they were debarred from marrying. To some young men, such a prohibition as existed in the case of Juliet Capulet and Kate Power, was almost irresistible. The spice of danger—of rebellion—in the adventure was enough to send them headlong into it. Had she not noticed during the frost of two years before that the parts of the lough that were marked dangerous were just those that attracted some skaters? For himself, he could not believe that a hard-headed fellow like Ned should contemplate doing anything that would mean simply ruin to his prospects in life. Of course, it was out of the question to suppose that his father

would give his consent to Ned's marrying Miss Power, and although Mr. Power was reported to be what some people called broad-minded, and so might possibly not oppose very bitterly on religious grounds a union between his daughter and a Protestant suitor whose worldly prospects were as good as Edward's, still, when he should learn that the day his daughter married such a young man, he would be disowned by his father and set adrift on the world without a penny, it might be found that he was not so broad-minded after all.

Mr. Kinghan added that as the law term would shortly end, he hoped to be at home in good time to talk over the possibility of doing something with her face to face.

He wrote to her in all three letters within as many weeks. If there had been a need to write a fourth, he would probably have thought it a bore; but he certainly was not so affected in respect of the three: on the contrary, he had a distinct sensation of feeling pleased at being the sharer of the secret of this pretty and attractive girl. She wrote very nicely. Her letters were the sort that one reads and lays down feeling that the writer has a head on her shoulders, and that is the place where a girl's head should be, not upon the shoulder of a man. It is not always the girl of whom you say that she has a head on her shoulders whom you would like to lay it on one of your shoulders; but Willie Kinghan had now and again a consciousness of wondering if he should ever get intimate enough with this correspondent of his to allow of her laying her head on his shoulder.

The idea did not come to him spasmodically. It occurred to him several times, as the links occur in a

chain, strong and binding. But before it had reached what might be termed the binding stage, he had made up his mind that whatever she might do with her head, it was necessary for him to keep his own very carefully. He had a good deal of the business instinct of the Ulsterman. He had inherited some of it from his father, who, in his turn, had derived it from his Scotch ancestors, who had come to the Plantation of Ulster in a business spirit, and had done very well for themselves and for the Plantation; and it was this same faculty of looking at everything from a practical standpoint that enabled him to see that it was worth his while being on friendly terms with a man of great influence, some wealth, and a very pretty and agreeable daughter. That was all the distance that he allowed himself to see in regard to his correspondence with Helen Alexander. He knew, of course, that he was still in love with Minna Thornton; but he was mortified to reflect upon the fact that he had not made much progress with his wooing of her. Still he had no thought of despairing of success eventually. He came of a stock that had fought many a fight against such odds as would have taken the heart out of most people. He would not be turned aside from his purpose by one rebuff, nor yet by two. He believed that perseverance and an equable temperament would some day meet with their reward. But meantime, he had a pleasant consciousness that he was not losing his time in replying to the confiding letters of a charming girl, whose father had large political influence in the Division which he himself aspired to represent in a House of Parliament that was situated in Westminster, and not in Stephen's Green, Dublin

(with a perpetual wireless connection with Maynooth).

And that was how it came about that one day towards the end of August he found himself sitting alone with Helen Alexander on that secluded seat in the middle arch of the well-clothed rose pergola of the garden at Ardreagh.

He had come to her in response to a letter he had received from her the previous day—he had not yet been at home a whole week, and most of this time he had spent in Belfast in consultation with the leaders of the Ulster Party to which he belonged. But when he got that letter from Helen he felt bound to respond to it. He went with the more alacrity, cautious man though he was, when she told him that her father and mother had gone to Derry for the August celebrations. He knew that Mr. Alexander was a man with whom he should be on the most cordial terms if he meant to succeed in his candidature; but the men to whom one must be rather more than civil politically, are not always those whom one puts oneself greatly about to meet socially. The pretty daughter of the most rampant political opponent is, however, always a joy to meet, if she is also sympathetic, not necessarily with one's politics.

He knew that he would hear no word bearing upon politics from Helen Alexander; and his convictions on this point turned out to be fully justified.

She had taken him out to the garden immediately on his arrival. The look with which she had greeted him made him conscious of the fact that he had greatly underrated her charm: she was distinctly handsome, and her colouring was most attractive.

There was something of pathos in the appeal she made to him. Here she was, a girl whose attachment to her brother was at conflict with the duty which, being conscientious, she felt she owed to her family: she was in terror lest her father should find out how her brother had been behaving, for she was ready to acknowledge that her brother had been behaving very badly! Surely, the elements of real pathos were to be found in such a situation for so sensitive a girl as this.

She would not begin at once to talk about the matter. She wished to know how he had been since they had met. She hoped he was not working too hard. She had seen his name in connection with a case that had come before the Court and had been a great deal talked about. He had won it—oh, he need not deny it; every person had declared that he had won it. What a life his must be! The life that she would elect to live if she were a man. And of course, he would be in Parliament within the year. Everyone was saying that the Party were lucky in having him. She was not supposed to hear anything, of course; no one ever considered whether she was present or not while they were discussing political affairs; and that was how she came to know a good deal of what was going on; and she could assure him that there was no difference of opinion as to the good fortune of the Party in regard to his candidature. She had also heard on excellent authority, though she was precluded from giving names, that his candidature had given a shock to the Nationalists from which they had not recovered. They had not liked it at all. They had fancied that the new candidate would resemble the

last—the last dozen—good enough for Aldermen or County Councillors or Guardians, but no match for the Nationalists either at making speeches or keeping silent. The way in which the Nationalists could keep silent when their leader raised his finger was masterly, she thought; and it was a pity that some of the *anti*-party would not follow their example. The mistake about them was that they made fools of themselves when they tried to make a speech, and remained silent when they should be asserting themselves. But now——

All this was very grateful homage to Mr. Kinghan; and he began to feel more strongly than ever that here was a girl with a head on her shoulders. She glowed as she prattled away, and he liked a girl who glowed at the right time. She was an exceedingly nice girl.

As a rule the Ulsterman resents being flattered. He cannot conceive the idea of a man taking the trouble to say nice things to another without wanting to get the better of him. The moment a man says something nice to him—even though he is a commercial traveller whose business is to make himself agreeable to customers, or possible customers—he keeps his eye on him suspiciously. But he will allow himself to be flattered by a woman until she makes a fool of him before he knows anything about it. Happily there are, however, few Ulster women who have more than the ordinary rudiments of the art which are at the command of all women. Willie Kinghan was an Ulsterman of the better sort; that is to say, he had got rid of many of the prejudices of his people, but not all. He flattered himself that he could detect the insincere note of a flatterer; and thus he did not object to

people saying nice things to him: he had lived for some years in Dublin where no one says anything to another except what is nice; and he was certain that this girl spoke out of the fullness of her heart; and his judgment on this point was not astray.

He had not the heart to lead her on to talk about her brother; she seemed getting along so nicely without touching upon the painful matter of her brother. His deprecatory gestures when she referred too flatteringly to himself were half-hearted. It was really Helen herself who suggested that it was inconsiderate for her to talk about such things as politics instead of the particular matter to which he had been good enough to promise her he would listen.

"I have been living in terror, Mr. Kinghan, and that's the truth," she said gravely, as befitted the change of theme.

"I can quite believe it," said he. "It is really very melancholy, this freak of your brother's."

"Freak? Oh, I wish I could think of it only as a freak," she sighed. "My favourite brother!"

"The worst of it is that interference with him will most likely drive him to take the very step we wish to hold him back from," said he. "One should go to work very cautiously in these affairs, if one means to do any good."

"I feel that indeed; that is why, as I wrote to you, I have done no more than give Ned the barest hint that I suspected something. But I also wrote to you of the evil influence that his uncle from Australia was having upon my brother."

"To be sure you did; his name was Richard—your father's brother."

"Yes; he turned up quite suddenly here—we had never so much as heard of his existence—and from the very first he seemed to set himself out to encourage Ned in his infatuation. I have known him scheme and tell lies and carry out ever so many plans of deceit so as to give Ned an opportunity of going to the Powers."

"What could he mean by that? Is he not a Protestant like your father? Surely, he must know that your father would oppose most bitterly such a thing as your brother's marrying a Catholic."

"He knows that very well; but it makes no difference to him. It would seem as if he had set his heart upon getting Ned to do something to annoy father terribly."

"That would be diabolic."

"Sometimes I think that he must be the Evil One himself, the way he goes on—that he has come here from Australia solely to break up our home. He can do anything he pleases with Ned, and, of course, Ned likes him because he bears him out in the falsehoods he tells in order to shield his visits to the Powers. And it is not Ned alone—he seems to have found out something about James as well—fancy James, who has always been as steady as steady can be!"

"He must be an unprincipled man. Of course, everyone knows that James is steady. The man's pretending to know something must be the merest bluff."

"But the worst of it is that I cannot see what motive he has for behaving as he does. That's what makes me think of him sometimes as the very incarnation of wickedness: he does things simply for the sake of what some people would call devilment; and he and

father have constant petty quarrels, and I'm sorry to say, but—oh, it is terrible—terrible! I would not say it except to you, Mr. Kinghan—nothing would induce me even to whisper it to anyone else; but you have been so kind—such a real friend to me—I know I can trust you."

"Indeed you can; but think, dear, if you should really tell me—what you were going to tell me."

He had laid his hand over one of hers soothingly; for he could see that she was becoming somewhat emotional; her voice trembled as she approached the disclosure, her eyes were averted from his face.

"No one else," she said in a low tone; "I would never, never breathe of it to any other human being; but I know that you—I know that you are not like others—I can trust you."

He assented with another gentle pat on the smooth back of her hand, and waited.

"Yes: I feel that I must tell you. That man lures on father to drink more than he should at night. Father has never been what one might call abstemious, though, of course, he insists on the boys being so; but only within the past month—since his brother came to us—has he been—been—oh, I cannot go on—I cannot!"

She broke down. Her voice refused to utter the terrible words. She burst into tears, letting her head droop forward and putting her hands before her face. Her sobs shook her—they shook even the framework of the seat on which they were sitting, and so brought him into touch with her emotion, as it were.

What was a man to do in such a case? When a girl has been giving her confidences on a very inti-

mate subject to a young man, making it incumbent on him to try to soothe her by laying his hand on hers, and then suddenly breaks down and bursts into sobs that shake the seat which they occupy side by side, and very close to one another, what is there left for him to do?

Willie knew, and he did it—not promptly, but after just the right interval.

He laid his hand soothingly on her waist, saying, as she leant forward:

"My poor child!—my poor child! I pity you with all my heart! It has been hard on you—far too hard to see all this—to hear all this. Believe me, you have all my pity—all the sympathy of my heart. I wish I could help you out of your trouble—you know that I do."

It was his left arm that was resting on her waist—soothingly—he perceived that the girl wanted a great deal of soothing—and at this point he put his right arm about hers that held her hands to her face, and after a soothing pressure, he kissed the side of her face that was next to him in the most soothing way possible in the circumstances; for only a part of her cheek offered its surface to his lips; but upon that comparatively limited area he implanted not one kiss, but several. In fact, he allowed his lips to rest for quite a long time upon the lovely bare patch; he did not think it necessary to remove them to express his sympathy; why should he make an attempt to tell her by word of mouth all that his mouth was capable of telling her without the need of words? After all, words are but a second line of sympathetic expression: the first line is the kiss.

She submitted without remonstrance. Why should she remonstrate when she was already sensible of being rapidly soothed? She knew that he was treating her as he would a child; but she also knew that a child's cheek presents a surface of the most exquisite texture for a really sympathetic kiss. She had no fears for the texture of her cheek: she knew that it was all right. She began to be sure that his judgment on this point coincided with hers.

But of course it could not go on for very long. That was the worst of it. It is a proof of perfect sympathy when the man and the woman succeed, without consultation, in determining when the kiss has lasted long enough. And curiously enough, in the case of a young man caressing a young woman as a child, the same dictum may be accepted.

By this instinct of satisfied sympathy they sighed in unison. She took her hands from her face, and grasping that one of his which had been nearest to her own, she held it for a few moments, saying—and he loved her for saying it, it showed so perfect an appreciation of his purpose:—

"You are quite right: I am nothing more than a child."

"What sweeter thing could you be?" he asked. "I tried to comfort you in your trouble; and I hope to heaven that I have succeeded—in some measure."

"Indeed you have," she replied. "I was utterly broken down when I thought of all the trouble there was in store for me. That is why I sought the child's refuge in tears. It was very good of you to bear with me and to—to—give me—such comfort as you would offer to a child in distress. I sup-

pose I must be as foolish as a child, for now I feel that you have taken me out of my trouble. I suppose it is the sense of being—being—in touch with someone who is strong that helps us in our need. At any rate, I felt that just now, and I feel it still."

"I am glad of that," he said. "Indeed, I would do anything I could for you. I am only sorry that I can do so little."

"Oh, you have done everything—everything. I have a child's feeling that you are strong—that strong man who will not let any harm come near to me. I hope you will let me tell you everything that happens. You may be able to help us all. I know that my father believes there is no one like you. He will let you do anything that you please with him. He will be guided by your advice."

"I can only promise to do the best I can for you. But you may depend on my never forgetting your position and on my looking out for a way of escape from it. Oh, my dear child, you do not deserve to suffer. You deserve all the good that can come to anyone."

He had her hand once more and was soothing it gently with his other hand.

"I love to hear you call me 'child,'" she said. "But I hope that you will teach me how to become a woman: I think you are doing so now. Indeed, I feel stronger—more courageous—more ready to face any trouble that may threaten me."

"I am glad," he said. "I shall come again when you tell me that you need me."

And that was how they parted. They had remained upon that well-sheltered seat, with the blooms of the

Dorothy Perkins and Hiawatha shining out above them from the depths of their boscage like stars of a hundred constellations out of a midnight sky; half a dozen gardeners might have been at work in their neighbourhood without catching as much as a glimpse of them. Helen was fully aware of the splendid seclusion of that particular seat—as a matter of fact, she had tested it once or twice before; for a good-looking girl has many opportunities of making such experiments when she has brothers and these brothers have friends. Some of her experiments had even involved her being granted that childlike comfort from other lips than those she had last felt on her cheek, even though at that other time she had not been weeping by reason of the burden of a family trouble looming over the household like a cloud. But now she left that convenient seat by the side of Mr. Kinghan, and with him walked down the avenue and through the big swinging wooden gate on to the road.

"Good-bye," he said. "You will keep me *au courant* of your affairs; and you may trust to me to do all that is in my power for you."

"Indeed, I will trust you—no one else," she said. She was looking into his face while he held her hand—just as one does a child's hand—a little longer than the convenances of hand-shaking account necessary for a casual parting; and he did not fail to see that her eyes were shining.

A charming and most interesting girl he had found her. A girl of deep feeling—sensitive in the highest degree, and emotional in the midst of a community that has always been stolid and unimaginative. How did such a girl come to belong to such a family, he

wondered. He had no confidence in her father, though he regarded him as extremely useful to a second-class "cause"; and he had no exaggerated opinion of either of her brothers. One of them, at least, was carrying on a countryside flirtation with a young woman who was the daughter of a Roman Catholic engaged in a business that could never be made to pay in these days of enormous importations of flour already milled. He did not know any facts regarding the elder brother; but he had the look of a man engaged in underhand affairs. How on earth did such a girl as Helen Alexander find her way into the Alexander family?

He thought a good deal about the problem of Helen during the next week, and the conclusion that he came to was that her cheek was as soft to his lips as the cheek of a little child. He felt that it had been one of his happy inspirations to assume her childhood with her tears.

He wondered what would happen the next time they should meet with similar surroundings.

That was a subject which required either a great deal of thought or no thought at all.

CHAPTER XXV

WHAT Helen had told Mr. Kinghan about her Uncle Richard was perfectly true. His influence in the household—upon her father and her brothers—was anything but satisfactory. From the first day of his appearance at the place he seemed to set himself out for mischief, and he had been extremely industrious to the same end ever since. His energies for evil seemed to be increasing daily, but his grand crescendo would only be reached, Helen knew, when her father had been made aware of the frequency of Ned's visits—carefully shielded by her uncle—to the Powers. She knew that this discovery would mean the climax of the diabolic scheming of her Uncle Richard; and she almost longed for the crisis to come upon them so that they might get it over and know the worst—or the best.

But, as she had told Mr. Kinghan, it was not alone in regard to Ned and Kate Power that the disturbing influence of her uncle was exercised in the household. He seemed to have felt from the first that while the younger of the brothers liked him, the elder looked on him with anything but favour. James made no attempt to conceal his distrust of their relative so far as he was concerned; it was not James's way to be frank on such matters either to his father or mother: he was not what one might term frank even to his

sister, but he was frank enough to make her aware of his feelings in regard to their uncle.

And she thought that he had good reason for disliking the man. He had a way of ragging James that was quite detestable. The true humour of the Ulsterman in this, the most degraded of all the byways of intimacy, consists in the probing of an unhealed wound —the touching of a raw place with the broad tip of a finger fresh from the pot of red pepper. In the writhings of the victims are to be found the elements of the finest humour, if his tormentor knows anything of what humour really is. If a man's wife is known to possess a temper of her own, the fact is made the subject of daily jests by his friends in her presence. If he has been married for some time without having a family, he is "chaffed" upon the incident without stint. If he is a teetotaler, he is recommended to order a case of whisky, and if he is an unrestricted drinker, he is recommended to reduce his potations. So it is in regard to every incident in one's life that one would like to have forgotten; the North of Ireland ragging humour is like that of the hoppers built in the shipyards in Belfast, which dredge from the depths of a murky channel a number of obnoxious things that were much better hidden out of sight.

Helen knew that her father's sense of fun was of the hopper kind; she herself had writhed under it many times.

"What ails the gyerl that she can't manage for all her dressing up to hook some of them chaps that comes about here?" was a constant exclamation of his in her presence—he had quite a number of dainty little enquiries of the same nature when young men had been

to the house; but she knew that within recent years this form of pleasantry was showing signs of decay: it was only her father and such-like men that maintained it; and when her uncle showed a tendency to practise it in season and out of season, she became exasperated. This was, of course, very tactless on her part, for it showed him that his shafts had gone home, and this encouraged him to make fresh attempts to irritate her.

She did not tell Willie Kinghan how annoying he was in regard to herself; she had only touched upon his attitude toward her elder brother; and she might have said much more than she did. For instance, everyone knew that business took James very frequently to Belfast; and surely he might claim to be exempt from any bantering on this score; but no; every time that James was known to have been in Belfast his uncle had something sinister to say about it.

"Hallo! hallo! what's this anyway?" he would cry. "Belfast again! That's thrice this week, so it is! Heth, it's thinking I am that there be to be some attraction in Belfast that has nothing to say to the business that draws ye in that direction so frequent, Jimmy my lad. Come now and tell us all about her. What's the good of keeping it all in?"

What chance had poor James against this sort of chaff? He could do no more than frown and rise from the table at the earliest possible moment.

Of course, James was beyond suspicion. If he did not grumble at having to go so frequently to Belfast, and being forced sometimes to stay there all night, that was only because he so closely identified himself

with the interests of the mill, that he was ready to submit to any inconvenience for their furtherance.

But the diabolic scheming of her uncle went beyond such trifling as the badinage of the table. He was a pretty hard drinker on this holiday of his to the old country where whisky plays so important a part in the history of a good many business concerns; and Helen's father had never been ridiculously abstemious himself. For years his wife had been accustomed to awaken now and again—perhaps once a fortnight—in the early hours of the morning, and noticing that his place was vacant, to throw on a dressing-gown, and lead him upstairs from a solitary orgy. She had done so on the night of his brother's return; and she did not regard such an incident as any more lamentable than it would have been thought a hundred years earlier.

Helen had, however, more modern views on such matters, and she regarded her father's frequent potations with great disfavour—almost with disgust, and, consequently, she was not disposed to take a lenient view of the convivialities of his brother and himself in the dining-room where they sat when all the household had gone to bed. Her uncle encouraged her father in his drinking, and every week she was awakened after midnight by the sounds of disputation and quarrelling coming from the two brothers. They invariably quarrelled in their cups, and more than once she had heard the crash of tumblers, and marked in the morning some damage done to the frame of one of the engravings or an ornament on the mantelpiece.

At breakfast, no signs of the quarrels of the night were apparent in the demeanour of the men. Only her uncle had sometimes remarked, with a wink, that it had been "quare and windy" through the night, for he was almost sure he had heard something go down with a noise like a brattle of thunder. She hated the Ulster jests upon over-drinking in which the man who exceeded was the hero, and her father's loud laugh at those silly remarks of his brother grated on her ears most horribly. She wished with all her heart that Richard Alexander would curtail his visit, and return to Australia for the remainder of his life.

And then one day when James had been again detained by business in Belfast, and the family were eating their lobsters and cold ham with cups of tea beside their plates, and James's absence was commented on, Richard said:

"What for don't you marry him on some decent gyerl and give him a chance of stopping at home?"

"Whereabouts is the nice gyerl?—tell us that," said Helen's father.

"There's enough for him—ye don't want more nor one at wonst for Jimmy," replied her uncle.

"Whisht with your blathers!" said her mother.

"Ay, that's all very well—but yiz 'uns knows as well as me that it's time the both of them had houses of their own," said Richard. "Now, I seen thon gyerl of the Colonel's—Miss Thornton, she's a nice enough young woman, and she's bound to have a bit o' the needful—what for wouldn't she do for Jimmy? I marked her at church on Sunday and thought well of her, so I did."

"Man dear, I never heerd tell o' such blathers!

Do you suppose that Miss Thornton would look at the likes of our Jimmy ? " said Mrs. Alexander.

Her husband was roused in a moment.

" And what for wouldn't she look at our Jimmy ? " he cried. " Who the hell is the Thorntons that they should turn up their noses at us ? Does any of ye know what's the pay of a colonel in the Hussars ? for that's what Thornton was before he retired. It's this I'm tellin' ye, it's not more nor Joe Campbell makes as manager for the Megarrys' mill—it's under four hundred a year that it is."

" D'ye tell me that ? " said his brother.

" Ay, it's me that tells it till you, and everybody else that has ears," replied James.

" Hear him talk ! " cried his wife. " Don't dunch our Jimmy on to he makes a fool of himself, for he'll do that if he gets intill his head such a notion as that Miss Thornton would look at him."

" It's me that's tellin' ye we're as good as the Thorntons any day o' the week. All the differs betwixt us is that we live in a house that I built nine years ago, with a longer dining-room nor the Megarrys' and the Thorntons' to boot, and them 'uns lives in a mouldering ould shanty that was built near two hundred years ago ! Them that has to live in an ould worn-out place like thon isn't the ones that should turn up their noses at them that can pay for new houses that looks as fresh after nine years as the day they were built. Just take a glance at this house from the outside, and say if it looks a day over a year old, and then let 'em look at the Thorntons', and if he doesn't say that it looks its full age and more forbye that, he's a liar."

"Bully James!" said Dick.

"I've heard tell of people that would rather live in an old house than a new one," remarked Ned, who was at the table, and listening with great interest to the discussion.

"Then ye've heard tell o' dam fools," said his father.

"I'm not saying they're not," replied Ned. "But what's the use of fighting over such a question as whether Miss Thornton would have Jim or look down on him and the whole bunch of us, when everyone knows that she's engaged to Willie Kinghan?"

"Who said she was engaged to Willie Kinghan?" asked his mother, after glancing toward Helen for a second.

"Everybody knows it," replied Ned. "Willie Kinghan goes in and out of Lisnabreen as if it was his own house. Didn't you see how the Colonel beckoned to him when they were going out of church on Sunday last, and off they went together, Miss Thornton smiling up at him just the same as a girl does who——"

"Bully Ned! man! Doesn't he talk just as if he knowed all about them things?" said Richard. "And him never lettin' on that he seen or heerd tell of a gyerl in all his born days! Bully boy! What were you for sayin' about the way the young woman looked? She hadn't a skelly in one of her eyes, that bid her see yourself, eh, Ned?"

"Ned's too clever by half, I'm thinking," said his mother, after another glance at Helen. "But I'm not believing that he sees farder nor his own nose, if he thinks that a young lady like Miss Thornton will let all the world see that she's in love betwixt the church porch and the gate."

"If we have much more about Ned it'll be him we'll set to make up till Miss Thornton," said Mr. Alexander in the tone of one uttering a threat which everyone knows he has the power to carry out.

"And serve him jolly well right too!" cried Dick energetically. "He'd change his tune I'm thinking, if he was bid marry a young lady like thon. I'm sayin', James——" he turned to his brother: "What for don't ye bid him make up till her?"

"I've half a mind to do it, and I will too if I hear much more of his ould talk," said Mr. Alexander, with a scowl toward Ned.

But Ned was accustomed to the discipline to which well-meaning fathers in Ulster subject their sons, no matter what age they may have reached, and he knew that the paternal scowl means no more than a discouragement of forwardness. Perhaps he had been too forward in suggesting that Miss Thornton would think herself "far above" the Alexander family.

He replied to the fatherly scowl by a smile that suggested a certain filial independence. He trusted that it would be accepted in its true spirit by his father. He was getting a little tired of the perpetual evasion necessary in regard to his relations with Kate Power; and, of late, he had not been quite so careful as he was at first. The concealment was bound to come to an end sometime, and he occasionally felt inclined to say "the sooner the better."

CHAPTER XXVI

A BAZAAR and fancy fair—it was spelt "Fancie Fayre" in the circular—was to be held in the demesne of Lord Innisfallen, in aid of the local branch of the Red Cross, and as Minna Thornton and Helen Alexander were members of the Ladies' Committee, a sort of bazaar intimacy sprang up between them. In the North of Ireland, charity, like poverty, makes strange intimacies; and it is understood that if one does not get on speaking terms with people with whom one was not on even nodding terms before, it is one's own fault, when an effort has to be made to release a church from the debt that is hanging over it, or to establish a Convalescent Home. There is a great unbending in certain quarters at such times, and a great uplifting in others. There is scarcely any part of the world where there is so little social "mixing" as in the North-East of Ireland. The exclusion of certain families from the circle that is supposed to be the best is full of mystery. It may arise from the fact that one of the excluded includes a girl who gives promise of being quite good-looking, or a son who has gone to Rugby and Oxford, when the offspring of the arbiters of exclusion are forced to be content with a Belfast school with the local University to follow. The attainment of any distinction by a member of an excluded family in art or science constitutes a barrier

to the entrance to the best society, that can never be surmounted. Of course, it does not matter much to those members who have won some distinction; for they take very good care not to remain in Ulster one minute longer than they can help; but the stain of their eminence remains upon their relations who are not so fortunate as to be able to live elsewhere.

The qualifications necessary for *entrée* to the "best circles" are vague. It is not necessary that the men should be moderate drinkers, or that the women should have either education or good manners, or that they should have seen anything or known anything worth knowing. It is a splendid trading community, but success in trade does not really confer a position upon any family, unless that family is connected with the trade in whisky, pigs, or manure. In Belfast a business man may be made the butt of the whole community by reason of his rasping idioms and the grammar of his sentences, and yet he gets on friendly terms with some of the Ulster nobility, and when he dies a statue is raised to commemorate his Belfast accent. A tradesman in a back street, whose ignorance of everything outside his own trade was displayed upon many occasions in public, was knighted for his want of success as a Unionist candidate for Parliament and he has his statue also, though there are eminent tradesmen in the principal streets who remain in the ranks of tradesmen socially.

But to say that in such matters Belfast differs greatly from other great trading centres would be wrong. It is only when Belfast is compared with Dublin that the former seems ridiculous. Dublin has

its statues; but they commemorate great men, though the restoration of its two cathedrals commemorates success in the manufacture of commodities that have been preached against for centuries as the curse of Ireland!

In the neighbourhood of the small but important manufacturing towns of Ulster, society is about as mixed as it is in places similarly situated in England. But a bazaar—unless it be a Roman Catholic one—never fails to bring about a *rapprochement* between the exclusive and the excluded—only for a time, of course, but even that is regarded by the excluded as better than nothing, and they constantly live in hope that the time will be extended if they show by their subscriptions, or their activity, that they are really nice people, speaking (when on their guard) with the English accent, and scarcely a trace of the staccato of Ulster. They are the more hopeful when they have the opportunity of hearing that some of the exclusive families speak as broad and as idiomatic Ulster as the workers in their own mills.

The Alexander family had not reached the most exclusive set socially; though it was thought likely that the boys might, if they looked after themselves, hope to have their claims considered; but the girl was too pretty to be taken up by any of the superior ladies, who had, as a rule, several extremely plain and awkward girls of their own to exploit. But Helen had frequently spoken to Minna Thornton, even before they had come together under the banner of the Red Cross, and had said that she liked Miss Thornton. Her more intimate friends went so far in expressing their condemnation of her doing so, as to say that it was

very nice of Miss Thornton to be nice to "that Alexander girl."

The father of "the Alexander girl," however, gave a good contribution to the Red Cross branch and his daughter could not be excluded from the Committee, no matter how exclusively inclined were some of the promoters of the Fancie Fayre; and she had thus an opportunity of meeting Minna under Minna's own roof and of drinking tea there after the transaction of some business.

Upon such occasions their conversation was not confined to the prospects of the bazaar. Everyone knew that the success of the affair was wholly dependent on the weather. Given a fine day, everyone would go to the demesne, if it was only to see the fountains play and the cascade working.

On the day following the usual breakfast-table bickering at the Alexanders', Helen got a letter from Miss Thornton asking her if she could manage, without inconveniencing herself, to send to her certain lists of the articles some Belfast tradesmen had offered to supply on less than trade terms for sale at the bazaar; and Helen, knowing there was no time to lose in deciding which were the most saleable things, brought the list in her own hands to Lisnabreen.

A full hour was occupied discussing the lists, and then Minna had tea brought to her own boudoir where the business of the bazaar was daily transacted, and poured out a cup for her visitor, still talking shop and shopkeepers. Half an hour later, Helen rose to go away. She had actually shaken hands with Minna before the latter said casually:

"Oh, by the way, we have had a few very nice

subscriptions since last week. There is one from a Mr. Richard Alexander—he writes from your house: he is not your father?"

"He is my uncle—my father's brother. He has been staying with us for the past six or seven weeks. He comes from Australia," said Helen.

"Then I am sure that we are indebted to you for his five pounds," said Minna. "I have no doubt that you make an irresistible advocate, Miss Alexander; and, talking of advocates, we have got another five pounds from Mr. Kinghan. You have met Mr. Kinghan, I'm sure? Oh, yes; I remember he told us some time ago—on the Sunday after the Demonstration—that he had been having lunch with you."

She spoke so casually that Helen began to suspect that there was more than a little truth in what her brother had asserted regarding Willie Kinghan and the girl before her.

But this did not necessarily make her jealous of Miss Thornton; the fact being that when she looked at Miss Thornton and saw all her gracious bearing—her charming naturalness—her freedom from any trace of self-consciousness—her instinct for doing and saying exactly the right thing at the right moment, she felt that such a girl was far beyond the jealousy of any other girl in the world. No simple girl is jealous of a princess—of a queen—an angel. She looked at Miss Thornton worshippingly. She knew in a moment that if such a girl set her heart upon Mr. Kinghan, none other in the world had a chance against her. All the planning that the cleverest might invent in order to have half an hour with him, would be of no avail

against the unconscious fascination of a smile of Minna Thornton's.

She scarcely knew what she was saying when she murmured:

"If the first five pounds came to you on my account, we all know that you and you only are to be thanked for the second."

Her face was rosy as she spoke: she had a feeling when she had spoken that such a suggestion as she had made was the sort that would come from one commonplace schoolgirl to another.

Miss Thornton looked at her with a little smile of interrogation.

"I don't quite take your meaning," she said. "Please tell me what is in your mind—you spoke with some point, you know."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Thornton. It doesn't matter now," said Helen, looking down.

"Of course it doesn't matter; but I should like to know just what was in your mind when you said that—that—what was it?—that the second contribution was due to me—that I was to be thanked for it. Will you tell me how you fancy that I should be thanked for Mr. Kinghan's generosity?"

"I thought—but I had no business to say anything like that—I really only meant that you—you and he—he and you, I meant—that of course it was only to be expected that—that——"

Helen got so far, but no further; she did not know what had come over her: she was far from being emotional at any time of her life, and the things that set other girls crying bitterly had set her laughing; but now she raised her eyes to Minna Thornton's face,

and the next moment she was lying with her face down upon the cushion of the sofa in a passion of weeping.

And Minna at that moment learnt her secret and pitied her exceedingly.

That was why she stood there, and allowed her outburst to wear itself out. She knew that it was not in her power to say or do anything that would shorten that paroxysm: it would have to run its course. No word from anyone would help the poor girl out of her misery.

For some minutes Helen remained sobbing like a child beyond the possibility of being comforted. But when her sobbing became less heartbreaking, and worked itself out in little gasps, Minna took a step beside her, and, kneeling by the sofa, laid a consoling hand upon her shoulder.

"My poor child! my poor child!" she said soothingly.

In an instant Helen had started up and stood with clenched hands above her.

"I am a fool—a pitiful fool!" she cried. "Oh, I felt that I had always such a command of myself that nothing could ever make me give myself away—and to you—to you above all people in the world! Why, oh, why did I do it? Why are you on your knees? It is I that should be on my knees begging of you to forgive me for making such a scene—oh, I don't suppose that there was ever such a scene in this room since it was built! I should fall down on my knees—I should—I must—it may not yet be too late."

Down she dropped on her knees before Minna had

quite regained her feet—down she dropped, catching Minna's hands in both of hers and crying:

"Give him to me—give him to me! It is nothing to you, but it is everything to me—*he* is everything to me. I love him—I love him, and I shall never love anyone else. Give him to me if you would save my life. You can get others—anyone in the world—the best in the land would come to you if you so much as raised a finger—you are so beautiful—so gracious beyond all the world—but I am nobody, and—and he kissed me when we were together last—and I love him and——"

"Oh, my dear child, do not try to tell me anything more—indeed, there is no need. Pray rise—I will help you," said Minna, and the pitifulness of seeing the girl kneeling at her feet in that way was too much for her: the tears had come to her eyes. She made a movement as if to withdraw her hands from the hold of the girl—gently but firmly—but Helen would not relinquish them.

"I will not let you go until I have told you all," she cried. "I will not let you go until you have promised to give him to me. I admit that I told you a lie just now—when I said that he kissed me. I should have said that he did so just as he would kiss a child that was in trouble. I was in trouble—not so much as I made out to him, of course, but still——"

"Oh, my dear girl, I really must refuse to hear another word," said Minna. "You should not have told me anything: there was really no need, for Mr. Kinghan is nothing to me—nothing but a friend."

"What, you don't love him? Oh, do not tell that to me."

In Helen's voice there was such a tone of incredulity that Minna could not help smiling. But it was very pitiful to hear this girl refusing to believe that it was possible for anyone to avoid loving the man whom she loved.

"I have only told you the truth," said Minna. "I have always liked Willie Kinghan, but I never loved him. You will believe me, I am sure, when I tell you that I love another man. I do love another man—with all my heart and soul—oh, just as truly as you love Willie Kinghan. Now, I hope you are comforted. Whatever chance you may have of his loving you in return, you may depend on my keeping my word when I promise you that I shall never come between you—never marry him. There is my hand on it."

Helen was now on her feet, looking at her wonderingly. What sort of woman was this who could love someone in preference to Willie Kinghan? Minna was more wonderful even than she had thought her. But she was telling the truth. However inexplicable it seemed, there was no questioning her word; and with a chance of loving and being loved by Willie, she had of her own free will chosen to love quite another man. The thought was too wonderful to be taken in all at once. She could only look at the girl before her with amazement in her eyes.

At last she had recovered her senses sufficiently to allow of her grasping the situation.

"I have made a nice fool of myself!" she said in a low voice, her eyes upon the floor. "But everybody said so—no, not everybody—but I thought from the way you spoke just now, mentioning his name——"

"I would advise you not to listen too closely to all

that people gossip about in this neighbourhood, Miss Alexander," said Minna quietly—she had begun to fold up some of the papers connected with the bazaar, and Helen could scarcely fail to take the hint. "In small country places like this, there is bound to be a great deal of gossip—people find the affairs of their neighbours extremely interesting; and everybody wants to be first with some piece of news. It is not nice, occasionally it does harm. Happily, in this case, the harm has been averted; but think what might have been if you had not—confided in me."

"Yes, I confided in you. It was a piece of cheek, but——"

"And I confided in you, did I not? Well, then we are even, you and I. And I am as sure that you will not betray my confidence as you are that I shall keep your secret. Good evening, Miss Alexander. Perhaps you would not mind thanking your uncle for his handsome donation—and Mr. Kinghan as well—I hope you may see him shortly. Ten pounds—I call that excellent work, don't you?"

Helen said she considered it simply splendid, and went home without another word.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE satisfaction which Helen felt at being in possession of the knowledge that Willie was free to be loved by her—a long time had passed before the thought followed that he was free to love her—was modified by her recollection of the incidents leading up to Miss Thornton's happy announcement.

When she said that she had made a fool of herself she had not gone very far, she thought. Had any girl ever put herself in a more humiliating position before another? Had any girl ever played her part so wretchedly? How could she ever again look at Miss Thornton in the face after behaving in her presence pretty much as a young housemaid would behave before her mistress when taxed with walking out with a young man? Oh, that was no analogy at all, for Miss Thornton had not taxed her with anything: it was she herself who, without any reason whatever, had begun to "chaff" Miss Thornton about Willie Kinghan, just as one common schoolgirl might "rag" another about a young music master or even a young chauffeur—at her school in Belfast the good-looking chauffeur of the doctor had formed the subject of a fortnight's "rag" among the girls.

"Oh, yes; we all know why Willie Kinghan is so ready with his five-pound notes," she would have said if Miss Thornton had not been so stately—on a plane so

much higher than any that her own feet had trodden. "Oh, yes; mighty charitable he is! Don't we all know that he did it for somebody's sake—somebody that'll be nameless?"

That was really what she had said in substance; those were the words that had been in her mind to say, though she had been self-possessed enough to alter the vulgar phrases of the badinage that might pass between the scullery and the kitchen to some that might be considered a little better—say, on a level with the innuendoes that came from the pantry window when the grocer's cart called for orders.

She recollected the way Miss Thornton had opened her eyes while asking what on earth she meant. Yes, that must have been what caused her to break down so completely and to utter that humiliating imploration. She wondered if any girl, since the world began to know what 'tis to love, had ever thrown herself at the feet of another, entreating her to let her have her lover!

Oh, she had been mad—mad—mad! The tears of mortification came into her eyes as she recalled the scene and saw herself, pink-nosed and red-eyed, kneeling clumsily—for the dress she wore did not lend itself to genuflexion—at the feet of the tall, beautiful and self-possessed girl, catching her hand and whining out her ridiculous petition.

The poor girl wiped her eyes as she walked along the road to her home; and with the action there came the consoling thought:

"What does it matter how big a fool I made myself? She is not engaged to Willie Kinghan. What does anything matter so long as Willie Kinghan is free to love me?"

It was a consoling thought.

A few weeks before she had got him to come to her side and to sit with her in a secluded place—even to press his lips upon her cheek several times, and to let them remain for a considerable time upon her cheek, although she had more than once heard that he was engaged to marry Miss Thornton. She had now and again since then a qualm respecting her behaviour in this connection; but now she was ready to exult, as a reaction from her sense of humiliation, in the memory of those kisses. She had chosen to think of them for some days as merely the kindliness of a grown man in respect of a sorrowing child. Her sense of fairness had forced her to submit this view to the consideration of Miss Thornton, when she had alluded, in a slightly boastful spirit, to these kisses; but now it pleased her to think of them, as she had felt them to be—as the warm kisses of a lover. If he remembered them—if he had enjoyed the touch of his lips upon her cheek—the dwelling of his lips upon her warm flesh—then she felt that she did not care even though Miss Thornton should tell all the world what a fool she had made of herself. With Willie's recollection of her warm flesh, she felt that she had an ally not to be despised. She believed, by a curious instinct, that the pressure of his lips upon her cheek constituted a sort of seal that bound him to return to her. And this was surely something to be exultant over.

Thus it was that for the next few days she was happier than she had been for a long time. Happiness and hopefulness mean the same thing; and she was now hopeful, with waves of depression as she recalled the details of the scene in which she had taken an active

part in the presence of Miss Thornton, and ripples of dissatisfaction when some provincialism of more than ordinary force and vigour came from her father or mother. How frightfully vulgar such expressions would sound in the ears of Mr. Kinghan, she thought once more. How could she ever hope that his toleration would be large enough to allow of his conversing with her father or mother? But then she recalled the appalling "accent" of Sir Daniel Driscoll, who was a baronet, and whose son had married the daughter of a peer. If people were content to treat as a negligible quantity something that grated so fearfully on her ears and made her face hot with shame when manifested in the presence of an educated person such as Mr. Kinghan, why should she be so foolish as to exaggerate its importance? She remembered, with satisfaction, the visit that she once paid to the ladies' cage at the House of Commons, when she had been appalled by the grammar, the diction, and the pronunciation of Member after Member. There was not one of them that did not put in an "h" in words where there was no such letter, apparently trying to keep the balance even by omitting the same letter from other words in which it should have been heard. It seemed to her that the more aspirations a Member had, the more shaky he was in the matter of aspirates.

And what about the Unionist leaders who were regarded with some respect throughout England? Why, no one seemed to care a jot if they spoke with all the brogues of the bogs!

These reflections were consoling to her when she heard her father call across the garden to the boy who was weeding:

"Ah'm sayn, wee fella; ah'l hit ye the quare skite if ah catch ye sleutherin' around thon flower beds waitin' for the chance of thruffin' something, the way ah seen ye do yesterday. D'ye mind that? It'll not be tellin' ye, if ye don't behave."

Or when she heard her mother take the boy's part, crying:

"Houl' yer whisht, mawn dear! D'ye expect a boy that's spent his time slitherin' in and out o' sheughs all day to be as brave a gardener as his daw? Oh, but ye're the sore bully when the wee falla's doin' his best."

She heard the boy replying to her father, explaining that he had "thruffed none," and there was no perceptible difference between his accent and that of her father or mother.

She had need, at such moments, of all the consolation she could derive from her recollections of the shortcomings of the orators in the House of Commons or on the Unionist platforms.

A week had passed since she had been to Lisnabreen, and she had met Willie once only in the meantime. It was at a lawn tennis party at the Rectory. They had come together for a few minutes, and he had asked her if Ned was getting sense and paying less frequent visits to the Powers.

"I have heard it said in more than one direction that he is actually engaged to marry the girl," said he; "so what I cannot understand is how your father has never made a row about it."

"It is miraculous how he has escaped so long," said she. "I fancy that Uncle Richard has a good deal to say to the concealment: he knows all about it himself. Ned and he talk together quite con-

fidentially about Kate Power. Oh! the lies that I have heard them tell to put father off the scent! It's shameful—with Uncle Richard's winks and nudges—I don't think that Ned himself half likes the part he has to play. I certainly hate the part that I have to play—keeping silent when they have been telling the most dreadful stories—giving father to understand that they have been to some place else when just a few minutes earlier I have heard them talking together about being at the Powers!"

"My poor child, you must find it very distasteful," said Willie.

"But I feel that a crisis is coming," said she. "I heard Ned say yesterday that he was quite 'sick of playing such a part.'"

"He said so to your uncle?"

"He did. And uncle said that he would be ready at any time to stand by him, and let father do his worst."

"Then that certainly does suggest a crisis. But what can they be contriving that should put your brother in a position to defy your father?"

She shook her head.

"The only thing that I can think of is that Uncle Richard may be ready to take Ned off with him to Australia. I believe that he has quite a large business out there, and he could easily find a place for Ned. I heard the other day that he was going to take out with him young Power."

"Perhaps his offer to take out his son may have something to do with Michael Power's agreeing to allow his daughter to marry a Protestant," said Mr. Kinghan, prompted by his lawyer's instinctive search

for a motive for everything. "But why should not your uncle be as much opposed as your father to such a marriage?"

"I really cannot tell, unless it is that he is doing everything that he can to oppose father and frustrate his plans," replied Helen. "Mother let drop a word or two about Uncle Dick 'having it in' for his brother about something that happened between them thirty years ago."

Mr. Kinghan, who knew that "having it in" for one refers, in some parts of Ireland, to a rod in pickle, smiled. He recollected hearing some gossip to the effect that the brothers Alexander had never quite hit it off together, and that in consequence Richard had gone to Australia. He did not, however, think that a grievance of thirty years' standing would be sufficient to account for Richard Alexander's attitude as described by Helen.

"If I could do anything to help you, I would do it at any sacrifice," he said; and Helen fancied she detected a note of tenderness in his voice. Was he looking, she wondered, at the part of her cheek that his lips had made rosy?

"I know it," she said. "I know that I can trust you, and I have a feeling that you, and you only, can help us out of our trouble."

"I have been thinking if it would really not be best for you to precipitate the crisis by boldly telling everything to your father," said Mr. Kinghan.

"I thought of that long ago; but I think that matters have gone so far that there will be no need for me to do anything except watch—watch and pray," she added in a low tone.

That phrase made its impression upon him. He knew that the old faiths are kept alive to-day by women. Faith he had always held to be the most womanly trait. Her downcast eyes, while she defined a woman's lot in life, watching and praying, imparted to her a beauty which he did not fail to appreciate to the full.

"I will come to you again," he said in a tone that was little louder than a whisper, for some prying folk were approaching the place where they were standing together.

"Thank you. I will write to you, if I may?" she said, also in a confidential piano.

"I shall welcome anything from you, even though you do not mention your brother's name," said he.

And perceiving that he meant what he said, she was exceedingly glad.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NO action on Helen's part was needed to precipitate the crisis. It came within a week of her conversation with Willie. She had seen Ned and his uncle conferring with great earnestness one day, and the next a friend of hers on the Bazaar Committee had asked her if it was not time that her brother was engaged to Kate Power, for she had seen them driving side by side in a motor-car through Arderry, and others had seen them as far away as Moneybeg. Kate knew that the motor was one that her uncle had hired, saying that he found he could not think up to date on the jaunting car of his brother's household.

"I find myself thinking jaunting car when I be to be thinking motor-car, and I can't afford to be fifty years behind the times—I need to be a bit ahead of them."

And so he had paid a good sum for the hire of a good machine, though his brother affirmed that, for his part, he hadn't found his intellect more active by reason of the change.

"I see no differs in you to what you were thirty years ago," said he. "There was always a bit o' the ould stick-in-the-mud about you, Dick."

"Ay, there's a wheen o' things more nor what you see, James, my man," Dick had said. "Some people can't see even all that's fornenst them. What do *you* say,

Ned? And as for bein' a stick-in-the-mud, I'll leave it till anybody to say if it wasn't you that stuck in the mud here while I went off thirty years ago; and I'll leave it till anybody that knows you to say if a fair share o' mud hasn't stuck till you, James, my man. Heth, and it's japped up till the neck that y'are, James, and with the sort o' clauber that sticks till a man like glue. Japped? Sowl, y'are that japped that a body might easy plant orange lilies on every bit o' ye, James, only whatever was planted on ye would come up different."

James only laughed at these subtle little sallies of his brother; and the motor-car went flying round the country, and James did not disdain to make use of it more than once; but it was Ned, the intrepid motor-cyclist, who was most frequently seen in the front seat, though apparently only once with Kate Power beside him.

But for him to have such a companion in such close proximity to himself in so conspicuous a place was sufficiently compromising to be commented on in the neighbourhood.

But it seemed as if Mr. Alexander turned away his eyes from seeing anything that was going on, and his ears from hearing the comments that were being made on all sides, for Ned pursued his own course without any question being put to him that he could not answer with an ordinary everyday lie.

But at last there came the evening when there was to be a full-dress review of the unauthorised local force of Ulster Volunteers, with a speech or two, if the weather was fine, at the close. It was, of course, to be a purely local gathering, for not more than a thou-

sand men were expected at the muster; and a thousand represents not a twentieth of the Ulster army of stalwarts. Belfast alone could put fifteen thousand armed men into the field, and this, too, without collecting them from beyond the precincts of the shipbuilding yards. But a local levy of a thousand men, every one of whom has been well fed since his infancy and accustomed to athletic exercises, is still something; for not only have these stalwarts been fed on the food that made their ancestors, the Scotch Covenanters, the toughest of foes; they have also been fed upon the principles that made those ancestors of theirs as obstinate as their native rocks in the defence of what they believed to be their rights. There is a good deal of basalt around the coasts of Ulster, and basalt is butter compared with the nature of the men, the bulwarks of whose heritage are of this basalt. The giants who chose this metal for their Causeway were able to do something with it, it is true; shaping it into the millions of monoliths that make the grandest roadway for the chariots and the white-maned horses of the Atlantic to rattle over; but these giants were not human; there was the giant of Fire that sprang from the hell of the volcano; the giant of Frost whose playthings were the glaciers; the giant of the Flood that rolled shoreward with the thousand thunders of the Atlantic roaring along that iron coast; and the men that have been bred among the basalt of Antrim have got it in their nature. Right or wrong, they are there; the natural elements of their character have to be reckoned with; and it will take all the giants of fire, earth, air, and water to build a causeway by which they will go to a House of Parliament in Dublin, to do

homage to all that they, in common with all the rest of the world, held most despicable a few years ago.

A thousand of these basalt brethren assembled with dreadful quietness and appalling solemnity in Martin's big field within half an hour of the blowing of the factory horns for quitting work. The muster had about it nothing of the festive character of the Orange gatherings on the Twelfth. Not more than a fourth of the men were Orangemen; the greater number thought the annual thumping of drums and the whistling of fifes something of a nuisance. They detested anything blatant—anything with the suggestion of brag about it. They were mechanics, engineers, farmers and the sons of farmers, clerks in the counting-houses of the mills, tradesmen of all types, the drivers of vans and motors, and the sons of country gentlemen home at the interval between the terms at Oxford, Cambridge, and Trinity College, Dublin; a score of students from the medical and engineering schools of the Belfast College; and in the ranks were also seven clergymen. They all streamed to the field, some driving, others riding, and all with the faces of men who have set their hands to the plow. Not glorying in their work, not regarding it as a form of recreation, but anyone who looked at their faces must have felt that whatever work was before them, they would go through with it. Anyone who saw them and talked of brag or bluster in connection with such men, was either a knave or a fool. Anyone could see what would be thought of the braggart or the blusterer by these men. If you had questioned any of them, they would have answered you by another question, and demanded to be told what they had to brag about. It was not England's

opponents in the last great war who did the bragging or the bluffing; but within a few months they had captured as many British soldiers as were in South Africa when the war began, and now their leaders are the governors of South Africa. Bragging and blustering have been regarded as soldierly qualities from the days of Goliath of Gath down to MacDermott of the "Tivoli"; but you would not have come in contact with much of either element in Martin's big field on this early September evening. A thousand men marched to their review, led by an officer who had won distinction as a leader in many campaigns, and there was neither cheering nor enthusiasm to greet the arrival of some other mounted men at the saluting point—all of them wearing their South African medals, for this district of Antrim had sent a mounted regiment of volunteers to the last war. Solid and stolid stood the Ulstermen, and the expression on their faces was that of men who have made up their minds.

It was not thought necessary that they should have weapons in their hands upon this occasion; but every man had his rifle and bandolier in a safe place at home, and every man knew where a million cartridges were stored. The evolutions in the field were of the simplest character, and they were executed with that monotony that means efficiency. Their instructors had been sergeants and colour-sergeants in South Africa, and had learned how small a part Aldershot and Sandhurst played in that campaign. The march past of a regiment of Boers would have been a deplorable exhibition of slouch in place of swagger, but they managed somehow to interfere with the precision of some parades in which these same sergeants

had taken part. They did not overdrill their men; they only made them efficient, and their men showed that they understood what was required of them.

If there were a thousand rank and file in the field this evening, there were, at least, double this number of onlookers. Mr. Alexander, with his wife and daughter, had driven to a good position in the front—on such an occasion, James Alexander was not likely to be found in a retired place. He had an opportunity of exchanging some words with Lord Innisfallen and Colonel Thornton, both of whom knew how important was the influence of such an employer of labour in the movement of which this little parade was part, and James Alexander listened without flinching to the compliments they paid him. It was not every man who could do so much as he for the Cause which they all had at heart, Lord Innisfallen affirmed, and it was not every Cause that was fortunate enough to have such an adherent. How many of Mr. Alexander's employees were in the ranks that evening, his lordship enquired. "A hundred and five," Mr. Alexander replied. A hundred and five of his hands and two sons, forbye a daughter with the Red Cross on her sleeve.

"A charming young lady; and a splendid record!" cried his lordship. "I saw one of your sons in the Corps of Signallers—a well set-up young fellow. They do you credit, sir."

"I've brought them up to it, my lord," said Mr. Alexander. "I've lairned them their duty; that's all that I could do. The both o' them knows what's expected of them and isn't likely to disappoint us when the time comes."

"I'm sure of that," said Lord Innisfallen. "It's the

spirit that pervades the movement that makes its success certain in the end."

"That's what I say, my lord," cried James Alexander. "It's the spirit that counts; and though I says it that shouldn't, there's no readier lads nor mine in yon field the night. The both of them would neglect anything they had on hand sooner nor be away from a parade. What do ye be sayin', sergeant?"

He addressed his enquiry to a sergeant who, for some time, had apparently been trying to get a word with him. But when Lord Innisfallen was at hand to converse with, the man had not much chance.

"I just wanted to ask you about Mr. Edward, sir," said the sergeant.

"What about him? Isn't he with the rest of them?" asked Mr. Alexander.

"He hasn't turned up yet, sir; and the despatch-carriers were to be here for important duty at a quarter-past seven, and now it's ten to eight and Mr. Edward hasn't shown himself."

Mr. Alexander looked over the field. The motor-cyclists were there, standing by their machines, and, plainly, somewhat put out. Watches were pulled from pockets and examined with half-audible comments. He could not see Ned among the seven or eight waiting men; and yet he knew that Ned had left the mill at the usual hour on his machine.

"What's the hitch, sergeant?" asked a mounted officer, who trotted up while Mr. Alexander was scanning the field.

The man stood to attention.

"One of the cyclists hasn't turned up, sir," replied the sergeant.

"What's his name and number?"

"Alexander, 4791, sir."

"What's his relay?"

"Number one, sir; that's what has thrown us out so badly."

"Mark him off, and report to your adjutant. Detail Number 2 for the double duty. The parade can't be kept up all night for one man."

"Very good, sir."

The officer wheeled his horse, and the sergeant was about to carry out his instructions when Mr. Alexander called out to him:

"Who was that bid ye report my son?"

"Major Clarke, sir."

"Then go till him and say that if my son's reported there'll not be a man o' the name of Alexander in this movement. D'ye mind what I'm tellin' ye? I'll not stand by and see a son o' mine shamed fornenst the lot o' ye. The whole jing-bang o' ye can go to blazes."

James Alexander spoke in no low tone. The gentlemen who had been beside him moved off quickly to right and left, some of them smiling, others with their tongues in their cheeks.

A word of command came from the adjutant, and the men, who had been standing easy, sprang to attention.

"Despatch-riders advance and number. Number one?"

There was no response.

The sergeant hurried up to the adjutant's horse and saluted.

There was an interchange of words between the

officer and the sergeant. It lasted for a few minutes. Evidently the absence of Ned Alexander threatened to make the despatch-riding a fiasco, and people were making nasty remarks. It was only one voice, however, that cried out :

" Kate Power ! "

A dozen cried out " Shame ! "

James Alexander looked round with his hands clenched.

" By God, if I can lay a hand on yon rascal that called out that name, I'll lairn him," he shouted.

There was a silence of a few moments, and then there came the sound of a motor-horn.

" If thon isn't him, he'll never cross the threshold of my house again," he shouted.

There was another silence—a sort of shocked silence —but it lasted only half a minute ; then there was a laugh—a cheer from the spectators who were nearest the road, and, with a whirl, Ned on his machine went round the crowd and into the line of cyclists. He was off his machine in a second, and the mounted officer " snatched the situation out of the fire," as the sergeant described the incident that night, by giving the word of command :

" Despatches. Number one. Answer."

" Here, sir," cried Ned.

" Number two."

" Here, sir."

So he called out numbers up to eight. Before another minute had gone by, the motor-cycles were tearing off in different directions, and in five minutes more the " dismiss " was commanded.

James Alexander was so absent-minded that he

forgot to take off his hat when the National Anthem was being sung. His wife had to nudge him twice and make a motion with her hands before he had sufficiently recovered himself to know what was required of him.

"I hope your son's accident was not a severe one," came the cultured voice of Lord Innisfallen. "You saw that his jacket was covered with mud. I call it very plucky of him to turn up like that and then start his duty as if nothing had happened."

"I'll give five poun' to anybody that can tell me who it was that called out yon name," said Mr. Alexander. "Five poun' I'll give—five poun'!"

"Come away, man dear, and don't make a fool o' yourself before all these 'uns," said his brother soothingly.

"Five poun' I'll give," said the other. "Five poun'."

CHAPTER XXIX

HE would not go to bed until he had it out with Ned—so Mr. Alexander declared, when he had had his supper with the rest of the family, including his brother and his daughter, with the Red Cross still on her arm. It was understood that Ned's duty would occupy him quite three hours. Though the exact destination of any one of the despatch-riders was not known, it had been rumoured for some days past that the experiment was to be tried this evening of simultaneously joining communications between seven of the principal towns within a radius of fifty miles. A despatch was to be carried to the chief of the staff of the Ulster Army by each of the motor-cyclists, and a reply delivered to the head-quarters at Arderry on his return; the experiment being to test the trustworthiness and the speed of this important adjunct to the local brigade.

It was pointed out to James Alexander by his wife that, in case Ned had to deliver his despatch at the further side of the county, he could hardly be looked for before midnight, and even that was assuming that the accident which had delayed his appearance on the field was one that would not interfere with his riding at his best; but all was in vain.

"I'll not budge to I hear from his own lips what it was kep' him back," he said resolutely.

"Man dear, hadn't ye eyes for to see that the poor boy had his machine cowped on him?" cried his wife. "Didn't ye see for yourself that he was japped all over with mud? What for d'ye need for to ask the poor wee fella how it come about?"

"Quit your blatherin' and go till your bed if ye have a mind; I'll stay here my lone."

"Bully Jimmy!" cried his brother, pouring out for himself another (the fifth) glass of "Old Bushmills." "There's nothing like gettin' at the bottom of a thing like this. Didn't Ned quit the mill with the whole jing-bang o' them, and if so be that thon thing cowped with him when he was birlin' along the road, why didn't some of us see him and his machine lyin' there? What call had the fool-boy to be strealin' and straveygin' down every lony he come till? He knowed that he be to be on the field before an hour?"

"Away to hell with ye!" said James. "What the hell have you to do wi' my affairs, or the affairs of my family? You keep your mouth shut, my good man. Don't speak to ye're spoken till."

"Maybe that now," said Dick, smiling. "Ay, but maybe you'll find before daylight that if you wonst had a bit to say to my affairs, I may have a bit to say about yours, James, my man."

"Give over that nonsense, the two o' yez," said Mrs. Alexander. "Where's the sense of goin' on like that before the childer?"

Then turning to Helen, she added:

"Go till your bed, gyerl; you be to be tired after your long day; and it's not much good you'll get if ye heed all that these 'uns has to say. And you too,

Jim. I'll warrant you that ye'll not be so ready risin' in the mornin'."

Helen rose and said a yawny "good night" to no one in particular, and went out of the room. Her brother got up from his chair and was about to follow her when the sound of the motor-cycle was heard outside, and he pulled aside the blind of the window nearest the porch and peered out.

"It's him," he cried. "It's Ned come back."

"And who else would it be, pray?" said his father.

In another minute Ned had entered the room. He looked hot and dusty, but certainly not tired. There was a certain amount of swagger in his entering—an exaggerated attempt to appear very much at his ease that had just the opposite tendency.

"Hallo!" he cried. "What are you all up for? It's nearly half-past eleven. Is there anything to eat? I'm fairly clemmed. Forty-five miles as hard as I could peg. They sent me to Glasmore. Is that the remains of a duck?"

"I'll mix ye a stiff 'un o' whisky, Ned. Ye must have that before ye get on any furtherer," said his uncle.

"He'll get neither bite nor sup here to he tells how he didn't turn up at Martin's big field with the others," cried his father, striking the table with his clenched hand.

"Hold your tongue, James, and make less noise, will ye?" said his wife. "Ay, it's duck, Ned; but all there's left on it isn't the size of a midge's knee buckle. Try yon ham. I hope your machine didn't cowp wi' ye on the road to the field, Ned. We all seen that the dirt was that thick on ye that ye might ha' been sleepin' in a sheugh."

"There was nothing the matter with me, I give you my word—at least nothing of that sort," said Ned. He had the carving-knife and fork in his hands and was taking a commanding attitude above the ham. "Oh, no; I got off the machine when I knew I'd be late and had a good roll on the road. I thought I might have to make some excuse for being late. But as it so happened I hadn't."

"As it so happens, ye have now," cried his father. "Put down thon knife and fork and say how it come that ye left the mill with the sound o' the horn and yet didn't show yourself before all the people was whisperin'——"

"Heth! they did more nor whisper, some of them," put in Richard.

"Who's talkin' till you?" said James. "Keep your mouth shut till you be spoken till."

Then he turned once more to Ned, who had helped himself to ham.

"Didn't ye hear me bid ye lay down thon knife and fork?" he cried.

"Don't be so foolish, father; I tell you I'm starving," said Ned, taking a bite off his bread and helping himself to mustard at the same time.

"Never heed him, Ned; go on with your supper in peace," said his mother. "Can't you let the boy have his supper first? What's come over ye anyway, James Alexander?" she added, frowning at her husband.

"Put down yon knife and fork! Do what I bid ye or it'll be worse for ye," cried his father.

"I'll do nothing of the sort," said Ned coolly, after giving a casual glance toward his father. "I'm past all that sort of bullying: I stood it long enough."

He said this last sentence with his mouth half full of ham.

"Edward—Edward, that's no way at all for ye to be talking till your father," cried his mother.

"No, it's not, I know that; but what other way could I be talking to him when he treats me as he daren't treat one of the carders at the mill? If I eat this ham and this bread I'm eating what I've earned —what I've paid for."

"What do ye mean, ye pup?" cried his father, gasping in the face of this revolt.

"I mean just what I say. You know as well as I do that when I agreed to stay on at the mill two years ago the terms were four pounds a week and my keep. Well, this is part of my keep, isn't it? You've no right to stop the supplies until we make a new agreement."

"And by God, we'll make a new agreement this night, and that'll be——"

"All right; we'll go into that presently. I was about to suggest that, for various reasons."

"Bully Ned! I'll stand by ye, never fear."

Ned turned to his uncle who had spoken.

"You mean well, Uncle Dick," he said; "but I don't need anyone to stand by me. I know what I'm about. Pass me those pickles, Jim, if you don't mind."

"Don't take one o' them red peppery things—you're bad enough as it is," cried his mother. "Now finish your supper in peace. What's the good goin' on like yon?"

"He was always full of his back talk; many's the clout I give him for it," said his father; but there

was no note of insolence in his voice now ; his protest was more of a grumble than anything else.

Ned gave a laugh.

"Many's a clout, indeed ; I haven't forgotten any of them. But I've done with your clouting now, father, I should hope."

"Now, Ned."

"All right, mother, I've done. I wonder if I might have a bottle of ginger beer. Tom Wilkinson, who left the mill and got a place in the school, told me a good one yesterday. He was taking a class on elementary geology and he asked one of the boys to name the best known minerals in the North of Ireland, and he replied, 'Lemonade and ginger beer.'"

"Look ye here, Edward Alexander," cried his father, starting up and assuming a threatening attitude, "I'll take none o' your lip here. Answer me this straight for'ard—where did ye pass your time from you left the mill to you come on to Martin's field? Now mind what you're about."

"I have no objection to tell you, though I don't admit your right to ask," replied Ned. "I rode on my motor-byke straight to the Powers, and I had tea with them. Then Kate Power and I went into their orchard and ate plums."

"Did ever ye hear tell o' the like o' thon?" said Richard in a badly simulated voice of amazement.

"I knowed it," cried his brother. "I could ha' knocked the fella down that come to me with the story of you and them Papishes. I knowed that it was them Papishes that got at you and made ye a traitor to the Cause. That's what I wanted to get from your own lips, and I've got it now. If you'd told me

a lie about it I'd have clodded ye out of the house this night."

"I've told you many a lie in my time, sir," said Ned; "and I should have added another to the number if I had told you that anyone at the Powers' had tried to detain me from the review this evening."

"That's a lie!" shouted his father. "Doesn't everybody know them dam Papishes and their ways?"

"It would appear not," said Ned. "This is the truth. Since I have been engaged to marry Kate Power I got a bit lukewarm—I confess it—about my work in the Volunteers; and I made up my mind that I would chuck the whole racket. I went to the Powers with the intention of not turning up at the parade; but it was Kate Power and her father that made me go. And now let me tell you that, Papish or no Papish, Mr. Power is as much against forcing Ulster to be governed by Nationalists as you are. It was he who said to me that unless I did my duty to-night he would never let me marry his daughter—he swore that by his Maker, and Kate joined him—they turned me out of their house and clapped the door in my face. Now you have the truth."

He put out his hand, took a plum from a dish in front of him and began to peel it in a reminiscent way; but his hand was a bit tremulous and his face was pale.

There was an awful silence when he had spoken.

His father lay back in his chair, a hand grasping each of its arms.

His mother wiped her eyes.

His brother had a waiting look in his eyes. He was ready to throw himself between his father and Ned at the right moment.

His uncle was smiling and licking his lips. He was feeling that his hour had come. It was for something like this that he had travelled all the way from Australia.

Of course he was the first to speak.

"Michael Power is as decent a man as——" he began, but his brother broke in on him as if he had not heard him utter a word.

"Ye young ruffin, ye!" he said in a voice that had nothing in its tone to suggest the voice of James Alexander. It was the exclamation of a man who is overcome with amazement—indignation. He spoke the words three times. "Ye young ruffin, ye!"

"That will do," said Ned quietly. "I know what you're trying to say, father; so you needn't say it again. I'm going to marry Kate Power and Kate Power is going to marry me; there's nothing you could say that would change that; so you'd best say nothing. It's too late now. So now we'll change the subject if you don't mind." ...

"Oh, Edward, Edward, is that any way for you to talk till your own da?" moaned Mrs. Alexander.

"I don't know that I've said a word that I shouldn't," replied Ned. "Did you hear what he called me—a ruffian?"

"And I called ye truly," said his father. "I suppose ye give her and her father to believe that you was well-to-do—that you was a good catch. Well, if that's not what a real ruffin would do I'd like to know——"

"Ay, but you've me to reckon with in this business, James, my man," began Richard once more.

"Ay, by the Lord, I have that, Richard, and I'll

know how to reckon with the rascal that egged that lad on to disgrace his family by marrying a Papish. But he's not married on her yet; maybe she won't be so ready when she learns that he's a pauper."

"Whoever tells her that he's a pauper will tell her a dam lie, James," cried Richard. "Man, d'ye think I'd let them suffer because I wanted to get equal with you through the two o' them for the trick you played off on me thirty-two years ago? When I seen how I could get at ye to give ye as good as you give me when you robbed me of my mill, I made up my mind that they wouldn't suffer. I'm taking Jack Power out to four hundred a year in Melbourne, and I'm ready to take out Ned and his wife to seven hundred. He'll be my son, not yours; mind that, man. You took my wee mill from me, so ye did. Well, I'm takin' your wee son from you, so I am."

"Now don't go on too fast, Uncle Dick," said Ned. "I don't know anything about what took place between you and father thirty-two years ago—I don't know and I don't care. I'm not going to be party to any scheme of revenge on your behalf or anybody's behalf. I'm sure that as father talked just now of making some new business agreement with me this very night, he'll carry out his word. I shouldn't mind a partnership in the mill the day I get married. Now, father, what do you say to that suggestion?"

"I say this, Edward Alexander, as sure as there's a heaven above us, the day ye marry a Papish woman, that day ye're no son o' mine. D'ye hear that?"

"Oh, James—James," moaned the mother. "You're never meaning thon! Never heed him, Ned; he'll be better in the morning."

"Will I?" cried her husband. "No fears! Out o' this house he goes—out o' this house—out o' my mill."

"Don't say anything rash, father. If I go out of the mill, I'll take the best part of the mill with me," said Edward coolly.

"You mean that—that—what are ye talkin' about anyway? D'ye fancy that the hands would go out on strike because I wouldn't have the husband of a Papish in the place?" asked the father.

"I'm not such a fool," said Edward. "No, what's on my mind just now is my Pin-Push Feeder."

"Your Pin-Push Feeder? What the hell ha' you got to do with it?"

"What? Wasn't it I that invented it?"

"What does that matter? Wasn't it me that adapted it to the machines? Wasn't it my money that paid for the change? Your Pin-Push Feeder indeed!"

"I called it mine because it *is* mine. I wasn't born in Ulster for nothing, for as soon as I found there was something in the thing I went to the trouble of taking out a patent for it, and registering it in my own name. The Megarrys found that out only a month ago, and they have already offered me twenty-five thousand pounds for a three-year licence. Do you want me to go past my own family in such a case? Oh, no; I've no mind to do anything so unfilial. I'll give you the option, father, and if you don't take it I'll stop your mill—*our* mill on Monday week, unless you choose to work without my—*my* Pin-Push Feeder. That's all I've got to say just now. Good night, mother dear—good night, all of you. I'm about done out."

He went out of the room, leaving his relations gasping and gaping in astonishment.

Susan Alexander laid her hand upon the arm of her husband, but not until the silence had become ridiculous.

"James—oh, James dear!" she moaned.

He shook her off.

"Don't you touch me," he said, but not roughly—only perhaps somewhat reproachfully. "Don't you touch me. The pup! Oh, the ungrateful young pup! After all that I done for him! The Megarrys! Such ungratitude!"

"Ay, this is the room that you be to make four foot longer nor the Megarrys'," said Richard. "I'm sayin', James, the Megarrys will feel that they have made up brave and well the day for that wee four foot."

"You go to hell!" said his brother.

"The very words that ye spoke to me when ye turned me out o' my own mill thirty-two year ago," said Richard. "James Alexander, I thank God that I was always a religious man—that's why I laid my curse on you when you done me out o' my property. And I thank God in a devout spirit that I've lived to see you turned out of your—*my* mill—*my* mill. I thank Almighty God that He has give me grace to see His hand in this. It has took time to do it, James, but they never neglected our religious instructions in Ulster, and my faith never failed me. I was in hopes that it would please God to give me a chance o' kicking you out with my own feet; but maybe it's just as well as it is. Who are the likes of us that we should take a job like this out o' the hands of God? And 'tis well known that God knows more nor us about mills. I was quarely heartened when I come across a copy-book of my son's more nor fifteen year ago, and there he had written out on ten different lines the pome that

had been set him: 'The Mills of God grinds slow, but they grind exceedingly small.' Don't they, James? I'll leave it till yourself to say if they don't. It's you that's being run through the heckles this night, James, with Ned's Pin-Push Feeder to keep the frame from wasting a single spindle. And how d'ye say ye like it? Man dear, doesn't it seem like yesterday when I stood up fornenst ye and said, 'I'm bate'? Is that what you're mutterin' the night, James? Aren't ye sayin', 'I'm bate—I'm bate'? for if you're not, ye should be."

"Get out o' this room, Richard Alexander, and don't darken our doors again," cried Mrs. Alexander, confronting her brother-in-law in the attitude of the virago which she had never been. "You're a crule merry man with your gibes, so y'are; but ye be to say them in some other house nor this."

"Let him be, Shusan, let him be," said her husband. "He spoke the truth if only for wonst. It's me that's goin'. I'm for my bed, and I don't care if I never rise from it. What was it that he said?—'The Mills of God grinds slow'—'grinds'—'grinds'; and yon fool-man there thought that it was a scutch mill—a scutch mill! as if God would have anything to say to a scutch mill. He knows better. Is yon Jimmy there? Ay, so it is. We've still you, Jimmy. You were never flighty, and it's not you that's goin' to marry a Papish."

"No, no; ye may thrust Jimmy," said Richard. "What for don't you say 'ay' to that, Jimmy, my lad?"

James Alexander, the elder, looked back from the door through which he was in the act of passing.

"Away to hell out o' this," he said, but not roughly, merely in the way the phrase is employed in the daily life of some parts of Ulster—not as a curse, more as a piece of kindly advice.

And Richard accepted it in the spirit in which it was offered to him by his brother.

"He's broken down," said the usually silent Jimmy, when he and his uncle were alone together.

"Broken down? Goo' morrow, Mick!" said his uncle, making use of the catchword of incredulity common in Ulster in the days of his boyhood. "Goo' morrow, Mick, indeed! Broken down? Not him. Not him. Not but what I'd allow that he's had a quare dunch the night. And says I till him thon night when I come here, sez I, 'I've never made up my mind how it was I didn't hit ye a skite when ye stood up fornenst me and turned me out o' my mill,' says I. And no more I didn't know then. But I know now, Jimmy: I know that it was God that was gettin' ready to hit him. And, man, when God hits out, it's the quare skite that He hits a man. It's none o' your dunts, it's a skite that staggers a body. I think that no matter whose owe this whisky I'll take a jap for luck before I go to my bed. It's been a busy day, so it has."

He filled out half a tumbler and drank it off.

"Good night, Jimmy, and don't forget to turn out the light," he said while he wiped his lips.

CHAPTER XXX

"WHAT'S this they're saying about that young Alexander?" asked Colonel Thornton of his daughter when they were sitting down to breakfast on the morning after the review.

"There are two sons, are there not?" said she.

"Of course; you know as well as I do that there are two," said he. "But I mean the one who didn't turn up until the last minute with the despatch-riders?"

"What despatch-riders? How long would it take them to carry a message to India, I wonder."

She spoke quite gravely; so that her father held his egg-spoon in the air and stared at her.

"What on earth do you mean?" he said. "This is the third idiotic remark you have made since you came down. I read in some magazine the other day that it took people two hours to get properly awake. I'm beginning to think there's some truth in it. I'm talking about young Alexander. David tells me that the fellow who sang out 'Kate Power!' when the young chap hadn't turned up, meant it as a sly and subtle suggestion that young Alexander was taking Power's daughter for a drive or something, when he should have been at his duty."

"I heard something about that handsome Katie Power and young Alexander," said Minna. "I don't suppose there is anything in it. The father would

never allow him to marry a Catholic. I wonder if there's a Postal Guide in your business room. I want to look up something."

"If there is one at all it's an old one. What is it that you want so badly to find out?"

There was a pause before she remarked:

"Kate Power is quite a nice girl—too good, I think, for any of those Alexanders. They educate their girls much better at their convent schools than most of the Protestants do theirs."

"Except the Moravians," said her father. "The Moravian schools are the best in the world."

"You remember when those Frenchmen who were staying with the Ormistons got lost when they were thrown out at the hunt, there was no one in Arderry who could say a word to them except Kate Power? She happened to be in the village at the right moment. I know that she speaks both French and Italian."

"I remember. But the Moravians would have turned her out quite as good a linguist," said he. "And they have schools everywhere. I remember in St. Thomas, in the West Indies, I was driving across the island to the lagoon, and hearing the sound of singing I followed it up and came upon a Moravian school filled with little niggers, all being well taught."

"I wonder if they have schools in the East Indies as well," said Minna.

"Of course they have. I remember a Eurasian missionary in Darjeeling getting up a crusade against them on account of their being polygamous; he had confused the Moravians with the Mormons."

"I wish you had taken me with you to India:

there's no part of the world that I should like so well to live in as India," said she enthusiastically.

"You'd get sick of it in a month," said he. "They say that there's sure to be ructions when Alexander *père* finds out that his son has fallen in love with the Power girl."

"He should be only too glad to get such a nice girl for his son. I suppose one can send a telegram to any part of India now."

Her father, who was shaking his *News-Letter* out of its folds when she spoke, paused in the operation, and turned his head toward her, saying:

"What were you asking? I didn't quite catch your words, my dear."

"Oh, I was only saying that I suppose one can send a telegram to any part of India now—different from the Mutiny days."

"Of course one can. Every little out-station has its line. In a year or two I suppose they'll have wireless. I see our Scotch friend, Mr. Ure, has been qualifying for a position between Ananias, who has for so long stood fourth, and de Rougemont, who must be a close fifth. If he goes on at this rate, they'll have to make him a judge to prevent scandal. David L. George will need to look to his laurels."

There was another pause, during which Colonel Thornton continued to make mumbling comments upon the news that came under his notice in the paper. At last his daughter, who was sitting in front of the coffee-pot and seemed greatly interested in the distortion of her features as reflected in the convex silver, said:

"But, of course, it must be very expensive."

"Of course it must be; everything is nowadays; but which do you refer to of the many details of expensiveness?" asked her father.

"I was thinking about the cost of a telegram to India," said she in a rather tremulous voice, but with a glowing face.

He lowered his newspaper and turned his eyes upon her.

"Save us all!" he cried. "What's all this talk about India and the progress of telegraphy? What on earth can you have to do with the Indian telegraph service?"

"I only remarked that I suppose it must cost a lot to send a message of even a very few words to India."

"Oh, is that all? I thought that perhaps—yes, a frightful lot—pounds and pounds. It's jolly lucky that neither you nor I——"

"But I have, my dear father—that is to say, I might possibly have—I don't know."

"I never heard of this. How many words have you to send?"

"One—only one!"

Her father looked at her closely. She was glowing more rosily—far more rosily than before. He threw down his paper.

"What's the meaning of this?" he asked, not in an imperious but in a very sympathetic voice. She gathered even an extra glow from his words. "Tell me, my darling, is the one word to be either 'yes' or 'no'? Is it that sort of a word?"

"It is to be yes—yes—yes!" she cried. "Even if I have to pay for three separate and distinct words, it must be 'yes—yes—yes.' It cannot be anything else."

"That would be extravagance; but perhaps on the whole, cheaper than niggling," said he. "And now may I presume to ask if the despatch is to be sent to a Sahib or a Memsahib, and if she or he has a name?"

She came from her end of the table to his, and sitting on his knee, put an arm about his neck.

"My dearest father, there never was anything so funny as this since the world began," she said. "There really was nothing to tell you until now—this morning—when the letter came from Major Benton—I suppose I must call him Guy—oh, I seem to have been thinking of him as Guy all my life."

"And perhaps he is a guy," suggested her father, "so all's well. So that's the source of your sudden interest in telegraphy? My dearest child, this is the hour that I have been looking forward to and dreading for the past—how many years?—fourteen?"

"Not since I was eleven, surely?"

"Since you were one, my dear."

"Ah, that is only since last year—I was only won last year."

"I did not pronounce it with a 'w,' Minna. Of all the happiest moments of a father's life, the bitterest is when the eligible and accepted parti appears on the horizon. And I do not feel that this hour is less bitter because I happen to be fully acquainted with the horrid eligibility of your Major Guy Benton. You may have noticed how hearty a welcome I offered to the three suitors—or were they four?—whom I knew you detested; and believe me, I do not welcome this one who, I saw long ago, attracted you."

"How could you see that long ago? He has not

been here since the eighteenth of October, and have I ever mentioned his name?"

"Never. That was what gave me ample assurance of your having been attracted, even if I had not eyes to see with and brains enough to put two and two together. You are a poor dissembler, I am happy to think; but you are the best girl in the world, and the only thing in the world that I love and that is left to love me; and when I got that letter from Guy Benton a fortnight ago and spent four pounds eight shillings and eightpence telegraphing a reply—he did not ask me to reply by cable, mind—I never grudged any expenditure more."

"You mean to say that he wrote to you a fortnight ago?"

"I do—at the expense of four annas; very different from my four eight eight."

"And you never said a word to me?"

"That was not among his instructions to me, and I am too old and too shrewd a soldier to exceed my instructions."

"Did your instructions include that telegram?"

"He was generous enough to let the telegraph part of the business remain optional. But I don't fancy that his generosity extended to you. Did he not entreat of you for heaven's sake——"

"Not for heaven's sake, only for his sake."

"That was just the opposite. Perhaps you think it was the same."

"Indeed, I do. But the whole thing—the whole incident—seems so strange. Everybody seems to have known everything about it except myself. I wonder if Lydia is in the secret too."

"Secret? An open secret, my dear. Everybody is talking about it and discussing whether you should be married in mauve or in white satin or in January."

She took his face between her hands and looked into his eyes. She saw that he could not respond in like fashion: his eyes were too dim to allow of his seeing hers except through their mist.

She looked at him, and her face fell forward upon his shoulder. She knew that he had been trying to hide his feelings beneath a mask of jocularity; and, for the first time, there came before her eyes the picture of a solitary old man sitting on the garden terrace with an empty chair beside him. In an instant she was weeping upon his bosom, with her arms clasping his shoulders.

"I will say no—no—no," she murmured. "I am not heartless; I will not leave you. Oh, why should anyone want to part us? Why?"

"My poor little girl!" he said in a low voice, and after a long pause. "My poor little girl! We did not make the world between us."

"But that is just what we did do," she cried. "We made up a world between us that no one else was allowed to enter. That was enough for us, dearest—and it will be enough still."

"Alas, no," he said, kissing her forehead when he had smoothed back her hair. "Our Paradise can never be restored to us since the tempter entered. What should I see every day seated on that chair beside mine on the terrace where we love to sit——"

"You have thought of that too? I saw you sitting there, and the empty chair beside you."

"And I saw that chair occupied by a grey-haired old spinster, 'still handsome,' the people would whisper—'still handsome, but what a pity it was she didn't marry when she had her option.' 'Had she a father?' 'Oh, yes; some old people can still remember her father—an egoistical old martinet who insisted on her keeping single to look after him.' But what I now see in imagination is not the empty chair that was yours on the silent terrace—no, but half a dozen chairs on the terrace, and a new rope bent on your swing, and a terrace not silent, but riotous with the laughter of the children. That is the picture which comes before my eyes and reconciles me to—to the expenditure of four eight eight on that telegram to Aligarh."

"Oh, my dear father, I feel that——"

"Exactly, my dear. I felt that way too. I don't see why we should be separated for more than a month or so every year. Surely, there are rooms enough in this house for all of us. I knew his father, Minna: he was an excellent fellow, and the property will come to your Guy at his mother's death. It is in Sussex, and we shall probably all find it a pleasant place of refuge when our Ulster is in the hands of the Nationalists. Now off with you and write your telegram. Only put 'Aligarh' on it; don't trouble putting in the Presidency—that would cost ten shillings more—let the Post Office people find out for themselves where it is—it's their business."

"Ah, but if it should go astray?"

"If it should go so far astray as to fall into the hands of another man, then, by heavens, you shall marry him. I will have no shilly-shallying—under-

stand that. You shall marry the man whom that expensive telegram reaches. Do you observe that the fellow does not use the telegraph himself, but leaves all that for our end of the wire? He might be an Ulsterman."

She laughed; but when she got as far as the door, she looked back, then, dropping into an arm-chair, put her hands before her face.

The expensive telegram was not despatched until another hour had passed.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE letter which Minna Thornton felt herself bound to write to Willie Kinghan immediately after she had sent off her despatch, imposed upon her a task which she reckoned the most difficult she had ever undertaken; and when Willie Kinghan received it that afternoon, he felt about it as a man might feel about a cushion that had broken his fall from a first-floor window. He had a sense of being benumbed, but that letter had broken his fall.

In the course of an hour, however, he had forgotten that nice cushion composition, and had begun to feel sore as men do when they have partially recovered from the effects of a fall, even when something has been between them and the hard earth. He felt very sore indeed. He had always had a pretty good opinion of himself, and he knew that he had good reason for it. He was well aware how excellent was his record in every direction. He had always been an exemplary son, listening to the dictates of reason, and never yielding to those impulses which have their ending in the husks which the swine do eat. He had always preferred a more digestible diet. He had done well at the University and he had done well at the Bar: he was on the eve of getting his foot on that ladder the top of which was at the entrance to a judge's robing-room. He had nothing to reproach himself

with, and until the last few months he felt that he had no reason to cast a reproach upon Fate for having dealt unfairly toward him. He had made good use of his time and his opportunities and he had been reasonably rewarded until now. It was the thought of this unreasonable rebuff that made him feel so sore. It was so unreasonable.

But that was, he now remembered, the way with men who had been successful in their life. The moment they had anything to do with a matter from which reason and logic had been sundered, they had failed—it was natural—inevitable—that they should fail. He had set his heart upon marrying Minna Thornton, and she had written to tell him that she was going to marry another man.

He felt, at first, as if his failure had been placarded in flaring letters that all who run might read; hence his humiliation. But it did not take him very long to perceive that there was no reason why he need fear to meet his friends lest he should catch a glimpse of them nudging one another and smiling as he passed. There was no need for any of them to know anything of his humiliation. It was, after all, only self-humiliation of which he was conscious, and he quickly discovered how he might retrieve his position and prevent the possibility of anyone even suggesting that he had had a fall. He saw, after a short period of reflection, that the most efficacious answer to any charge is that of the alibi. The best way of proving that you have not had a fall in a certain direction is to prove that you were not going in that direction at all, but in quite another.

Thus it is that a clever and far-seeing man such as

Willie Kinghan can upon occasions think and act and come to the same conclusions as the most ordinary of mankind; and thus it is that the man who is suffering from a rebuff from one woman, feels that his *amour propre* can only be restored by his proving to her as quickly as possible that he was not leaning all his weight on her, so to speak, but that there are quite as good and infinitely more appreciative women, ready to be as kind to him as she was unkind. In his "huff," Willie Kinghan found himself actually wishing that a number of people with no feelings of reticence had witnessed that secluded act of his in comforting Helen Alexander by kissing her half a dozen times on her cheek. He found, too, that it suited his purpose now to think of those kisses deprived of their childlike bloom—to think of them as one thinks of the peach that one has tasted, with its ripe flesh exposed, than of the same fruit with the bloom of innocence upon its cheek.

He thought a good deal about those kisses. Their fragrance was still clinging to his memory. He wondered if that sweet girl—hadn't he read in some American book about a girl who was called by her admirers a peach?—he wondered if she was feeling less acutely the unfortunate position of her favourite brother.

It was shortly after four o'clock when he found himself on the Ardreagh avenue. He would have liked to walk straight down to the seat in the rose garden, avoiding altogether the house and its possibilities; but that was, of course, impossible. Still, he might be lucky enough to find Helen alone in the drawing-room. Who could tell? It might be that the girl, with

that great trouble overhanging her, had given herself up to the seclusion of her own room.

But before he had pulled the bell, the inner door of the hall was opened by Mr. Alexander.

"You're the very man I was hoping to see, Mr. Kinghan," he said gravely. "I was on swithers whether to 'phone to you or to Jamieson, my solicitor. But you're a lawyer as well as him, and maybe your advice would be every bit as sound. Come in, sir."

"I hope that nothing serious——" Willie began. "If it were anything serious—it is more usual for a solicitor——"

"It's not just that—leastways, not just yet," said Mr. Alexander. "In coorse I know the differs betwixt you and an attorney. But if it comes into the Coort, you may be sure that you'll be the man for us. It's our eldest daughter Annie—Annie Drennan, you know. You seen her before she got married on Charless Drennan, in Belfast three years ago."

"Of course I know both father and son," said Mr. Kinghan in the cloak-room off the hall into which James Alexander had ushered him. "But he is a solicitor as well as his father, and I'm certain that his advice on any matter would be preferable to mine. Don't you think that he——"

"But he's not here and not likely to be here. In fact, Annie has left him and come back to us by the two train from Belfast."

"That's serious, Mr. Alexander—very serious indeed. I would much rather not be mixed up—that is to say, I feel that perhaps—a family difference—exclusively a family misunderstanding——"

"That's just why we want your advice, sir.

Troubles never comes singly, they say. I suppose it's all round the townland by now that Ned is goin' to marry a Papish, and here's Annie on our hands with a story about Charless and a baby."

"I understood that there was no family."

"No more there was; that's where the shoe pinches. She has none of her own, and here she comes with a story of a woman calling to see her this morning with a talk of Charless owing her money for the keep of a child."

"But surely she asked her husband for an explanation. I really don't want to be mixed—I mean that I should be reluctant to go into the merits of the case, but it is quite a usual thing for a solicitor to have to make arrangements respecting children. Why should your daughter assume that her husband is the father?"

"She took the bull by the horns—that was just like Annie—down she pegged to Charless's office in the town—they live on the Malone Road—and she saw Charless's father in the first place and boldly asked him if Charless was making any arrangements about a baby, and the father said none that he'd haird tell of. And then he called for Charless himself and brought him face to face with his wife. According to her story, he was dumbfounded and declared that he was acting in the matter of the baby for a customer. 'His name?' demanded Annie; and she says that that made him more confused nor ever, and he refused. 'It's the quare customer,' says Annie, 'that your father knows nothin' about,' and—here she is: my wife and her seen you on the avenue and bid me bring ye till them at wonst; but I thought it better—all right, he'll be with you in a minute."

The door had been knocked at pretty sharply while he was speaking, and his last sentence had been addressed to whosoever was knocking. He now opened the door, and Mr. Kinghan found himself facing Mrs. Alexander and her married daughter, Mrs. Drennan, a well-favoured young woman, bearing a distant but dreadful resemblance to Helen. She was the kind of woman who, one instinctively felt, should be very careful in respect of her diet, otherwise——

Willie looked at her, and his imagination was equal to the task of picturing her ten years ahead.

And there was that appalling resemblance to Helen.

She spoke quite confidently, and with nearly as pronounced an accent as her parents.

"I had a feeling that maybe you wouldn't stay to hear my story, Mr. Kinghan," she said.

"Come intill the room. We can't talk free in the passage for all the servants in the house till hear," said Mrs. Alexander.

He returned to the room and Mr. Alexander shut the door.

"How much has father told you?" asked Annie. "Don't you think I was justified in leaving him? I want your opinion, Mr. Kinghan. You're a counsel."

He observed that she spoke as the well-informed wife of a solicitor might be expected to speak—about counsel and counsel's opinion.

"But my dear Mrs. Drennan, you have already taken a certain course," said he. "It is a very serious thing a wife leaving her husband's house."

"Isn't it a much more serious thing a husband—did father tell you about the baby?" said Annie.

"He told me something. But don't you think that

perhaps—a solicitor does not like to give the name of a client in cases of this sort, Mrs. Drennan, that would account for——"

"For his father not knowing anything of it? Is it likely, I ask you, Mr. Kinghan, that there would be a thing of this sort going on in a respectable office without the head of the firm knowing all about it?"

"The case may be exceptional. In cases where there are babies—children—there is really no hard and fast rule in regard to guardianship and maintenance. I should really advise caution—great caution, before coming to any conclusion detrimental to—a home when once broken up, Mrs. Drennan——"

"That's what I've been sayin' till her for the past two hours," said Mrs. Alexander. "I'll leave it till her to say if I haven't. 'Annie,' says I, 'when all's said and done, a home is still a home; and it's a serious thing to——'"

"I'm not saying it's not serious. Oh, if it was anything but that—that—maybe I'm hard in my way of looking at it, Mr. Kinghan, because I haven't any of my own; but suppose it was me—I ask you, suppose that the baby was mine——"

"If it was, it would be all right," said her father.

"I'm not talking about it like that," said she. "I'm only saying, suppose that I was in his place—suppose that the baby—but, of course, you'll say that there's one law for the man and quite another for the woman. There I differ from you."

"So far as actual law is concerned, Mrs. Drennan, it is my duty to tell you that there is one law for the man and another for the woman," said the counsellor.

"Yes, man-made law," said Annie.

"Yes, and God-made law too, I can assure you, though man-made law is enough for me to advise upon," said Mr. Kinghan.

"I believe that in the sight of heaven the man and the woman stand on the same level," said she. "Do you mean to tell me that if a man——"

"Thank God, here's himself driving up the avenue," cried Mrs. Alexander.

"I think I had better go—I really do," said Willie.

"No, no, you be to stay, Mr. Kinghan," cried Mr. Alexander. "We need oil for the troubled waters, and I'm much mistook if Charless doesn't bring a bit of a breeze."

"He's come to confess," said Annie; "but I warn you, all the confessions in the box will have no effect upon me."

"Don't talk of confessions: we'll have enough Papish practices here shortly forbye confessions," said Mr. Alexander, as he went out of the room to admit the young man who now drove up on one of the railway station cars. He was a big well-made man of perhaps a year or two over thirty. He wore the frown of the business man of Belfast.

There was silence in the room until he was brought in by Mr. Alexander.

"Good day, Mr. Kinghan," said Charles Drennan, shaking hands with Willie, and then glancing at his wife, who was standing in an attitude of the wronged but proud woman, who in a year or two would be consulting doctors about a diet to prevent an increase of pounds avoirdupois.

"I only made a casual call," said Willie. "I have

no desire to remain. I think that in these little matters a stranger——"

"You will oblige me very much if you stay," said Mr. Drennan. "You are a man of the world——"

"There, you hear, he confesses," cried Annie quickly.

"Don't be a fool, Annie; what did I say?" cried her husband.

"When you appeal to Mr. Kinghan to be on your side because he is a man of the world, we know what you mean. We all know how men of the world look at these affairs."

"What affairs?" cried Charles.

"You know," she replied.

"I don't know anything except that you have behaved as no wife who wished to trust her husband would behave," he said firmly. "No, don't go, Mr. Kinghan. There's nothing going to come out that you mightn't hear; and you'll help us to get my wife to listen to sense and reason."

"I'm afraid that, considering the circumstances, surely—yes, I feel that I should only be an obstacle to the amicable settlement which I hope——"

"Why, if yon isn't our Jimmy driving up on our cyar," cried Mrs. Alexander, interrupting the negotiations for an exit which were being conducted by Mr. Kinghan.

"I thought he would be here by now: I 'phoned him from town to meet me here," said Charles.

In another minute Jimmy had jumped off the office jaunting car at the hall door, and had responded dully to his father's summons from the council chamber. He entered the room and looked around him. Mr.

Kinghan, who was accustomed to form an estimate of witnesses on appearing in the box, looked at Jimmy and then knew the whole story. But no one else seemed to do so.

"I'm glad you're come, James," said Charles. "For I know you'll be able to bear me out in all that I say. I was entrusted by—by—a client to look after a child during the absence of its father and mother, and with their consent I put it in the charge of a most respectable woman near Lisburn. The woman knew me, but she didn't know the name of the father. Now, as the matter was to be kept secret, I had sent the money for the child's maintenance not from the office, but from our house week by week; but, as I have just found out, for the past three weeks the remittance has fallen into the hands of a disreputable son of the woman, and she, naturally thinking that the money had not been sent, came up to town to-day and called at our house and saw Annie and told her all she could tell—that I had been paying for the maintenance of the child, but she had got nothing for three weeks. Now that's the whole story and the whole truth. The baby's nothing to me."

"So you say. That's your story," said his wife. "Well, if the baby's nothing to you, all you've got to do is to tell us the name of the father, and I'll forgive you."

"You'll forgive me, will you? For what, I'd like to know. Don't you think it should be the other way about?" said the husband.

"You will give her the name and have done with it?" suggested Mrs. Alexander, assuming the attitude of a caricaturist's Peace-maker.

"I'll do nothing of the sort. I'll give her none," replied Mr. Drennan. "No; I'll see her——"

"Mr. Drennan is a solicitor," said Willie, interposing just in time to shut out a word or two, "and the confidence of a client is, in the eyes of his lawyer, as sacred as the seal of the confessional."

"More Papistry!" murmured Mr. Alexander with a sigh. He seemed to have lost all his buoyancy to-day.

"I don't care anything for the sacredness of the confessional," cried Annie. "I've been brought up in Ulster, thank God, where the confessional and other Papist tricks are thought of as anything but sacred."

"You will never get the name of his client from him," said the representative of the higher branch of the profession, pretending to look about for his hat. "But, perhaps"—here he turned his eyes upon James the younger—"perhaps your brother may have been let into the confidence of—of—some of the child's relations, so that—you would not object to your brother-in-law communicating anything that he knows on this—painful matter, Mr. Drennan?"

"I certainly don't object," replied Mr. Drennan in his Belfast staccato. "But I don't know why you call it a painful matter. I wish to God the child was mine instead of his!"

"Instead of whose?" came from his wife, his mother-in-law, and his father-in-law at the same moment, but with varying inflections; and Willie perceived how their surprise prevented them from feeling the nasty thrust the man made against his wife. "Instead of whose?" they all repeated, when he failed to answer them.

"You heard what I said," replied the husband;

and Willie thought from his tone that he was somewhat ashamed of himself.

"Perhaps if you cannot switch a searchlight on to this matter, you may be able to strike a match that will enable us all to decipher the name that will bring peace to your sister's household once more," said Willie, turning to young James.

"I know nothing about it," mumbled young James.

"What—what the—well, I'm—you tell them that you know nothing about it?" cried Charles. "All right. I'm off to Belfast. You can stay here as long as you please, Annie. A week or two in the country will do you no harm. It's a nice sort of family I've married into. The car's waiting. Can I give you a lift, Mr. Kinghan? You and me will talk it over on the way to the station. I can't, for the life of me, see what you are doing in this house."

And that was just what Mr. Kinghan himself failed to see. He had found his hat and his stick.

"I am going," he said to Mr. Drennan; "but why should you go so soon? Talk the matter over carefully with—your client"—he looked pointedly at young James—"and perhaps daylight may begin to appear—I talked of a searchlight just now."

"A searchlight? Why, you hadn't to strike a match to let you see just how the land lay; and yet there these good people stand—oh, they're too much for me, these Alexanders! I'm going," cried Charles.

"One moment," said Willie. Then he turned to young James. "Don't you think the time has come for Mr. Drennan's client to give him permission to say what he knows? It would be folly to suppose that a thing like this can remain concealed for ever."

"He may tell what he pleases, I don't care," said James. "My uncle is ready to take me and Sarah back with him."

The flash of the searchlight was too much for the others.

"You and—Sarah?" came from the three other members of the Alexander family. "Sarah?—Sarah what?"

"Sarah O'Neil," James replied firmly. "We've been married for two years, and though she was a Catholic and the daughter of a car-driver, I don't know if she isn't as good as the best in our family. Anyhow, we're married, and that's enough for me. I'm sorry for this business, Charles; you stood by me as long as you could. I'm glad it's all over now. I felt mean. But you know how it was. It would not have mattered in my father's eyes if I had been an atheist, or if I had committed a murder—nothing compared with marrying a Catholic. That's what we've come to in Ulster. I thought we were learning sense and toleration; and so we were until this Home Rule nonsense aroused all the old ill-feeling and made us what—what—what my father is this day."

"There's something in what you say," said Willie Kinghan. "But, no matter whom you have married, your father will forgive you, and your mother too—she is dying to kiss the baby. Good-bye. I am glad everything is cleared up."

He got out of the room as quickly as he could. When he had closed the door, he found himself face to face with Helen. (The likeness between her and her more opulent sister was more striking than ever.)

"I was listening at the door," she said. "I heard

all. We're a nice family, are we not? How everyone will laugh and jeer—two Papist wives, and one of them the daughter of a car-driver; she was a waitress in the station refreshment-room! Good-bye, Mr. Kinghan. Shake the dust of the carpets off your feet when you leave."

"Don't talk such nonsense," said he. "These little things happen in the best of families. Only I hope you will not marry a Catholic, Miss Alexander. You know what Kipling says:

'East is East and West is West.'

Only, if you do marry a Catholic, I'm sure you'll make him the best of wives. Good-bye."

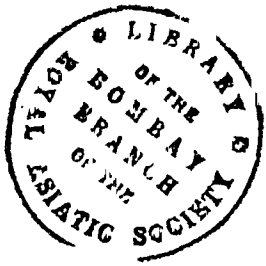
"I'll never marry anybody—now," said she.

"Oh, will you not?" said he, laughing. "I have never known of any girl making such a resolution who was not married before the end of the year. Good-bye."

She shook her head.

He got away from the house as quickly as he could. He wondered how it was that he had ever entered it.

THE END



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